DRUID MAGAZINE

On Being an American Druid

SUMMER 2016

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DRUID MAGAZINE

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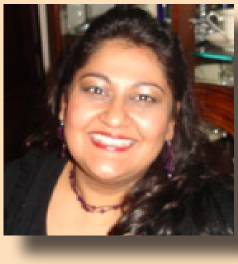
Information contained in this magazine is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any chronic disease or emergency condition. Content, incuding recipes and remedies, is not intended as a substitute for advice from your physician or other health care professional. Before consuming herbs, supplements, and/ or remedies and testing recipes, please consult with your physician or healthcare professional, and carefully read all information provided by the author or manufacturer, including the label of any homeopathic remedy.



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK...

RENU K. ALDRICH

Dear readers,

As the sun's light shines brightly in the sky dwindling each day, many of us are consumed by sadness, confusion, and fear watching the world seemingly fall apart. But we are not helpless in the face of such pain. Druids have a legacy of leadership, and we can cultivate our own paths as harbingers of peace through families and groves—and our communities. Leaving the world behind is often a topic of conversation among Druids, but we can help to effect positive change by being part of society rather than abandoning it.

So much communal pain seems to stem from our soul-shriveling alienation from the natural world. That sense of isolation leads to a very human desperation to belong that is too often achieved by labeling others as deviant. Druidry is a beacon in this storm of tumultuous humanity, teaching us how to develop a deeper connection to ourselves and others through nature and to celebrate the rich diversity of life.

When I feel the urge to give up, hope reclaims my determination to stand back up and keep trying whether it's viewing a video of a bulldog feeling rain for the first time or reading about people coming together and in solidarity after horrific tragedies. Today's news can make it feel like only bad things happen. While we must pay attention to the awful things that transpire so we can take a stand and make change, a truly holistic view also encompasses the positive in our world, the events and activities that uplift us. Technology has given us the power to find the light in the dark—the everyday beauty that can help us fan the flames of perseverance and determination.

In this issue, we have numerous examples of the good in life such as Moss Magill's service to the prison community and Joseph Rielinger's celebration of a beehive in his work. A new spiritual video library has been developed by Archetype Events featuring teachers such as our own OBOD Chosen Chief Philip Carr-Gomm on being one with nature. faucon of Sakinel's poem *Across the Hill* in *Voices of Awen* makes this connection come alive.

In *The Natural World* section, Moss teaches us how to extend the gardening season by using black fabric while Lyle Almond expounds on the ecological aesthetics of conservation landscaping. *Magical Crafting* offers two different perspectives on staffs. Leafwise Riverdeep shares the mystery of a wooden staff appearing in her room. faucon provides us with a deeper look at both physical and ethereal representations of the Druid staff.

Across the Americas, Art Scarbrough and Kathleen Harrington share experiences from the Gulf Coast Gathering, a growing and energizing Druid camp that takes place around each Alban Eilir in the stunning wooded ozone forests of the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana's Fontainebleau State Park. David North continues his excellent series on performing public ritual in *Ritual Space*, focusing on voice as part of the ritual body. Zack's article on ritual intention emphasizes the point that it is important to mean what you say and say what you mean. Parents wanting to share Druid beliefs with their children may enjoy Sarah Disler's review of *Rupert's Tales*, a beautiful children's book on the Wheel of the year, focusing on Beltane, Litha, Lammas, and Mabon.

The second part of my series on Dharma and Druidry shows how I merge these paths. Gail Nyoka explores Kathakali, the Hindu tradition of enacting story in dance that may resonate with the Bard in us all. In *Indigenous Ways*, Ken Muller (also known as faucon of Sakin'el) tells the moving story of meeting and joining his tribal family in Nevada. And Nadia Chauvet shares how she has become a global citizen through her spiritual journey in her engaging essay on being a Druid in America.

In addition, Wanda C makes a Beltane wish, and Leon Reed honors us with a tribute to his mother's life. Shelley Keneipp discusses how to use homeopathy to treat vertigo, which can be debilitating for those who suffer from the condition.

Photographer Teri Garrison-Kinsman joins DM through her breathtaking shots from around the world featured all throughout this issue. We are also introducing a new feature called World of Wonders to showcase in a little more detail the everyday beauty of our planet. In this issue, we place a spotlight on Shellhenge in the United Kingdom, a stunning 70-foot subterranean passageway covered in mosaics created out of 4.6 million seashells.

I invite you to submit wonders of your world either for the magazine or on our Facebook page. Reflecting on the practicum below, I also encourage you all to join me by posting periodically your "moments of joy" to radiate peace outward to the greater circle of humankind.

I hope that this issue of DM not only informs and entertains, but enlightens you and lightens your heart.

Yours in the peace of the grove,
Om Shanti,

Renu

PRACTICUM

In what ways do you or could you inspire peace in the world around you?

Renu K. Aldrich, M.A., LMFT, aka the Hindu Druid, has been a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids since 1997. She is a doctoral student at Virginia Tech, where she specializes in working with developmental trauma survivors and studies how to incorporate Eastern healing techniques into Western psychotherapy. Initially a journalist, Renu also has served as a communications executive in the publishing world, in academia, and on Wall Street. She launched Druid Magazine in 2015 in service to the spiritual community.

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NEWS FEATURES

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DHARMA & DRUIDRY:
MY PERSONAL JOURNEY INTO BELIEF AND SCIENCE, PART 2

BY RENU K. ALDRICH

The Dharmic religions, in my case Hinduism specifically, have a rich history linking it to ancient Celtic worship. In the first part of this series, I explored the connections between Dharma and Druidry in my personal life and through associations in linguistics, spiritual traditions, beliefs, sacred chant and meditation, and festivals and holidays. In this second part, I explore commonalities in mythology and folklore, symbols, astrology, music and poetry, and laws, customs, and training. Join me in my exploration into the mists of time, back into the present where we strengthen our ties to one another.

Myths & Folklore

Evidence of common folklore from Ireland to India is purported by Peter Berresford-Ellis (2000) as well as Stith Thompson (2007) in his book *The Folktale*, which traces stories from Ireland to India. Many surviving Irish and Welsh myths show remarkable resemblances to the themes, stories, and even names in the sagas of the Indian Vedas (Berresford-Ellis, 2000).

As a historically oral tradition, Druids believe in myth and the power of storytelling to heal and enlighten as well as entertain. Teachings are transmitted through the creative arts—most especially via parables and songs full of symbolism and inspiration. Celtic deities had multiple functions and represented the forces of nature, dispensing ideas on ethics, justice, knowledge, arts, crafts, medicine, speech, and harvests (Ralls, 2008). They were called *deuos* or "shining one" (Hinduism Today, 1994).

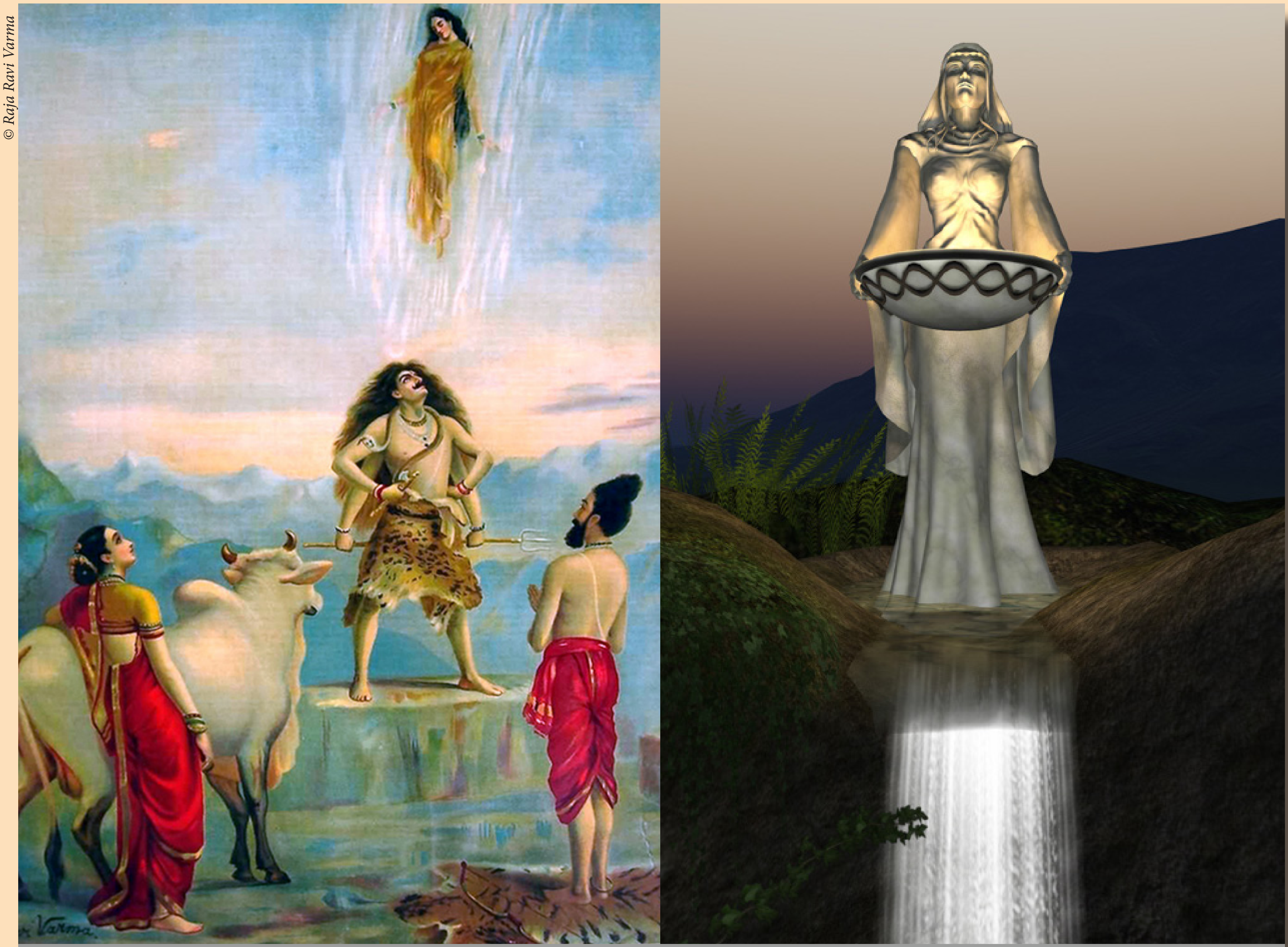
Meanwhile, the stories of Hindu Gods and Goddesses teach *dharma*, the spiritual code of right from wrong, and other important life lessons. The early Vedic pantheon included deities with overlapping functions, such as natural forces, speech, crafts, arts, harvest, medicine, ethical order, and war (Hinduism Today, 1994; Ralls, 2008). They were invoked as *devas* or "shining ones."

CELTIC	VEDIC
The God of thunder was Taranus, who carried thunderbolts	The God of rain and thunder was Indra, who carried thunderbolts
God of fire is Aedh (pronounced uh-ee)	The God of fire was Agni
The sun deity is Sulios	The solar being was Surya
The Celtic word for invocation is gutuater	The Sanskrit word for invocation is hotar

Figure 1. A comparison of Celtic and Vedic Gods (Hinduism Today, 1994)

(*See Figure 1 for a few comparisons.*)

According to Berresford-Ellis (2000), the parallels among Hindu and Druid Gods and Goddesses are almost endless. One common myth correlates the Hindu Goddess Ganga and the Celtic Mother Goddess Danu. Hindu myth says Ganga was a Goddess resting in heaven when Lord Siva brought her to the earth in the form of water to save and purify the sons of King Sagar and to rinse away the sins of mankind. According to an early Celtic creation myth, Danu fell from heaven in the form of rain and her waters created the Danuvius River. From this sprang the pantheon of gods known as the *Tuatha de Danaan*, who taught wisdom to humankind and fought valiantly against invaders. This race was also known as the *sidhe*. Interestingly enough, in Sanskrit the word *siddha* means "power" and *danu* means "waters of heaven." There is a temple in Bali dedicated to the Goddess of the Lake, Devi Danu. A Hindu Danu is depicted in the Vedic story "The Churning of the Oceans," a story with parallels in Irish and Welsh mythology.



(Left) Hindu Goddess Ganga descending to Earth; (Right) a depiction of the Celtic Goddess Danu

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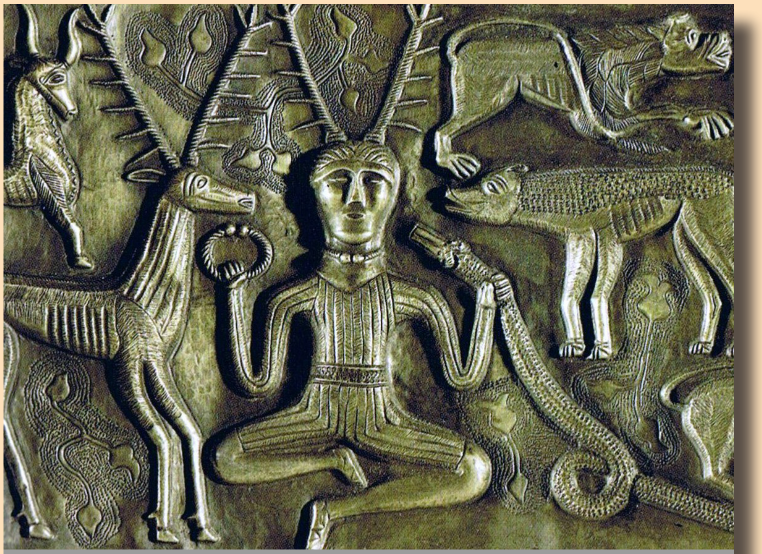

A section of the Gundestrup Cauldron—
depicting the Celtic God Cernunnos or the Hindu God Pashupati?

Other deities are also comparable. The Celtic God Cernunnos, or Horned One, is the God of fertility, produce, and the underworld. He has long hair and a beard, and sits cross-legged in a meditative state when not hunting. He wears torcs, which are ornate neck-rings. He is associated with a serpent, which has the horns of a ram. Pashupati is the Horned God of the Indus Valley and the proto-God of Lord Siva, the long-haired Hindu God who spent time immersed in the forest in the form of a deer. He often assumes a meditative pose, is garlanded with snakes, and is associated with fertility a la the Siva Lingam. He also uses a Bisana, a long horn. As part of the *Trimurti*, he is the Destroyer in order for re-creation to occur and, thus, wears the ashes of the dead on his body. Both are known as Lord of the Animals.

Gundestrup Cauldron is a silver vessel that was found in a Danish bog in 1891 and has been dated to at least the 1st century BCE. Analysis of the cup has challenged experts to re-think what we believe about prehistoric society:

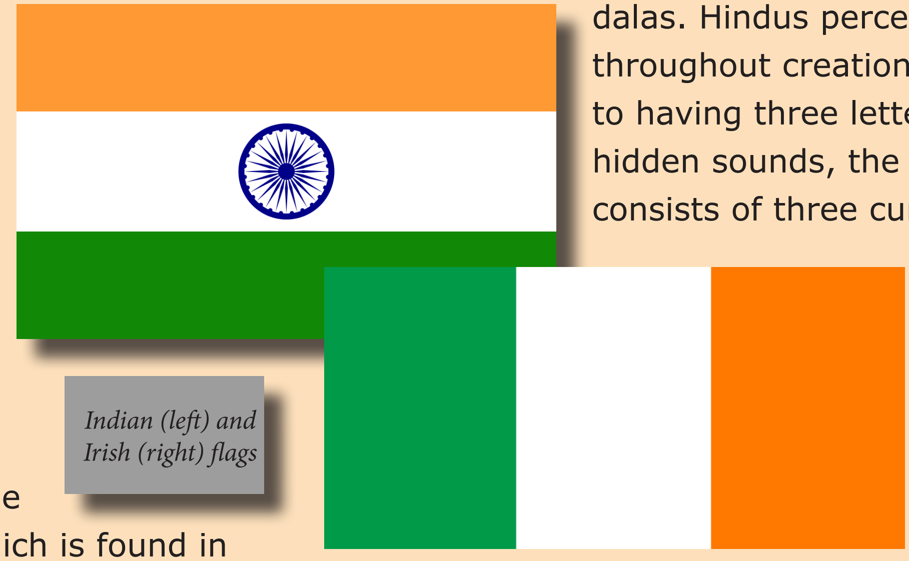
> Ethnicity, gender and mythology may all have been more complex than previously supposed. Firm cultural boundaries may not have existed, humanity and its gods may have been viewed as having more than simply male and female genders, and religious beliefs may have been flexible and multifaceted (Taylor, 1992, p. 84).

The cup has both what is considered to be extensive Celtic imagery and Indian iconography, but experts have also suggested Thracian or Scythian origins. This has led scholars to debate how Indian culture could have been transmitted from the East to the West (Taylor, 1992).

Symbols

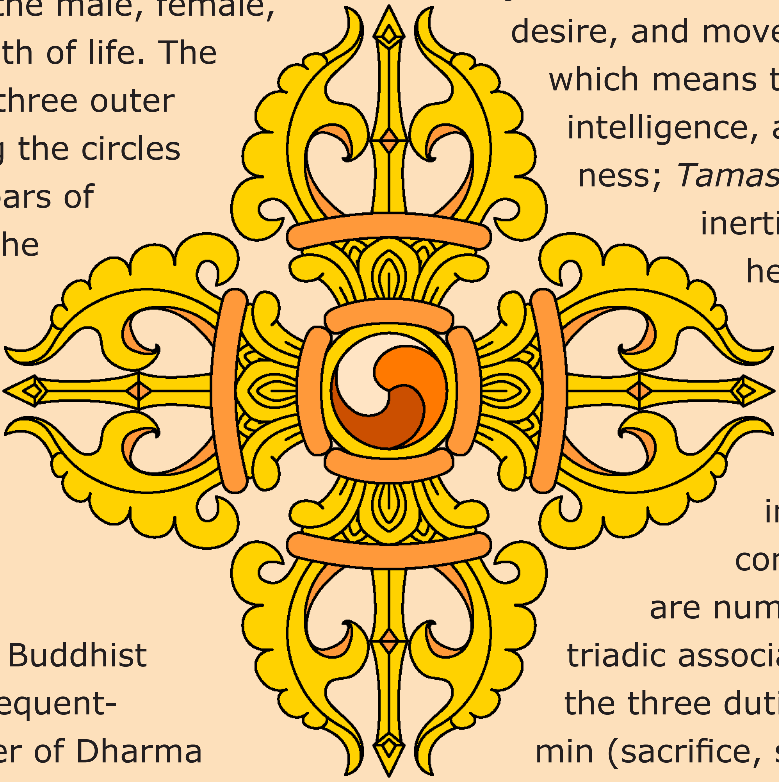
The similarities in symbols between the two cultures occur in many other areas. In modern times, the resemblance between the Indian and Irish flags is no coincidence. Both are representative of a truce between cultures and living in peace: Hindus, Muslims, and all other religious communities (Flag of India, 2016); and Roman Catholics and Protestants (Col, 2010).

Ancient symbols illuminate the enormous connections among Druids and Hindus, most notably the signif-



Indian (left) and Irish (right) flags

icance of the number three. Druid teachings include a storehouse of powerful triadic poems. One of the most important Celtic symbols is the triple spiral, which is found in many types of images, including a triskele or triskelion, and offers an array of associations to the sacred three, including the realms of land, sea, and sky, or mind, body, and soul. The spiral of life represents the cycle of life, death, and rebirth as well as the Triple Goddess—the Maiden, Mother, and Crone. It also symbolizes the male, female, and child on the path of life. The OBOD symbol has three outer circles representing the circles of creation, three bars of light representing the Triple Deity, and a triad of sunrises symbolized by dots (Summer Solstice, the Equinoxes, and the Winter Solstice).

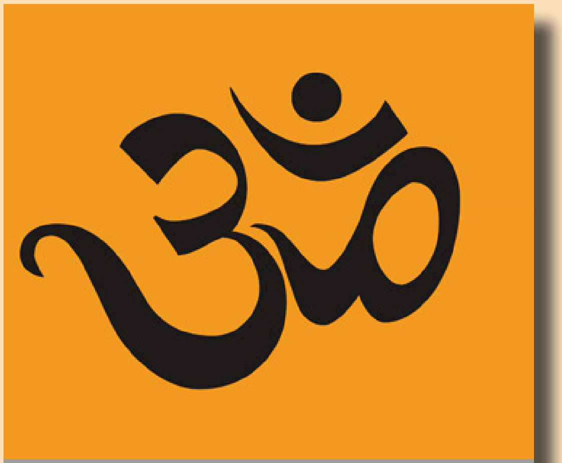


Four-pointed Buddhist vajra

In traditional Buddhist art, triskeles are frequently seen in the center of Dharma wheels, four-pronged vajras, and auspicious symbol mandalas. Hindus perceive threes all throughout creation. In addition to having three letters and three hidden sounds, the word *Aum* consists of three curves representing the three states of consciousness: moving wakeful, inner moving dream, and deep sleep state (Jayaram, 2010). The Hindi language's devanagri script depicting *Aum* even looks like the numeral three.

In Hinduism, the three strands of creation themselves are called *gunas*: *Raja*, which means activity, passion, desire, and movement; *Sattva*, which means truth, goodness, intelligence, and consciousness; *Tamas*, which means inertia, darkness, and heaviness (Doran, 2010). The *gunas* entwine to make everything in creation, including human consciousness. There are numerous other Hindu triadic associations, including the three duties of a Brahmin (sacrifice, study the Vedas, and charity), three paths to self-realization (knowledge, love, and action), and the three lines of ash worn by Saivites (those who worship Lord Siva) on their foreheads (Jayaram, 2010).

As mentioned previously, Hindus also have *Trimurti*, a Triple Deity—Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Siva the Destroyer. Siva is known as *Tryambaka*, the three-eyed Lord (Gradinarov, 2005). The three eyes have multiple associations and can represent *triloka*, the three worlds: the physical, astral, and causal (Subramuniyaswami, 2003); the three aspects of time: past, present, and future (Baba, 2010); or the sun, moon, and fire (Pandit, 2010). The third eye signifies spiritual knowledge and power. Siva is third in the trinity, is often represented as a triangle to mean 'absolute reality,' and has three braids of hair that represent the integration of the physical, mental, and spiritual energies. He carries a trident that some say represents God's three fundamental *shaktis* or powers: *icchha* (desire, will, love); *kriya* (action); and *jnana* (wisdom) (Subramuniyaswami, 2003). He is often depicted with a snake wrapped around his neck three times.


Aum, the Hindu symbol for the seed of creation

In India, the confluence of three rivers—the revered Ganges, Yamuna, and Sarasvati rivers in Allahabad—is a sacred site where the famous *Khumb Mela* religious festival occurs. Temples line the area, and hundreds of thousands of worshippers bathe in the water to purify themselves of sin.

Astrology

Berresford-Ellis (2000) cites numerous references linking Celtic and Vedic cosmology in addition to their use of the same word for the planet Mercury. Celtic astrologers used a system of 27 lunar mansions similar to the *nakshatras* in Vedic Sanskrit. Both the Hindu God Soma and King Ailill of Connacht, Ireland, had a circular palace constructed with 27 windows to gaze upon the 27 star alignments. A 1st century BCE Celtic calendar (the Coligny Calendar) discovered in 1897 had parallels to Vedic calendrical computations (Berresford-Ellis, 2000; Hinduism Today, 1994).

Both cultures conceived of cosmic creation as a sacrifice of a primal person or being, and they recognized four interrelated worlds of existence (Carr-Gomm, 2006; Hinduism Today, 1994). The Celts perceived the netherworld; the earth realm; the heavenly realm of the dead and demi-gods; and a white realm of supreme Deities and energy source of stars. Vedic cosmology cites the physical world; the astral world of dead and demi-gods; the causal universe of deities, the Supreme Being, and primal energy; and the netherworld. These planes divide into smaller existences occupied by those of similar character and where time moves slower.

Sheila Chandra, former musician of Indian descent, singing the Scottish tune Lament of McCrimmon/Song of the Banshee.

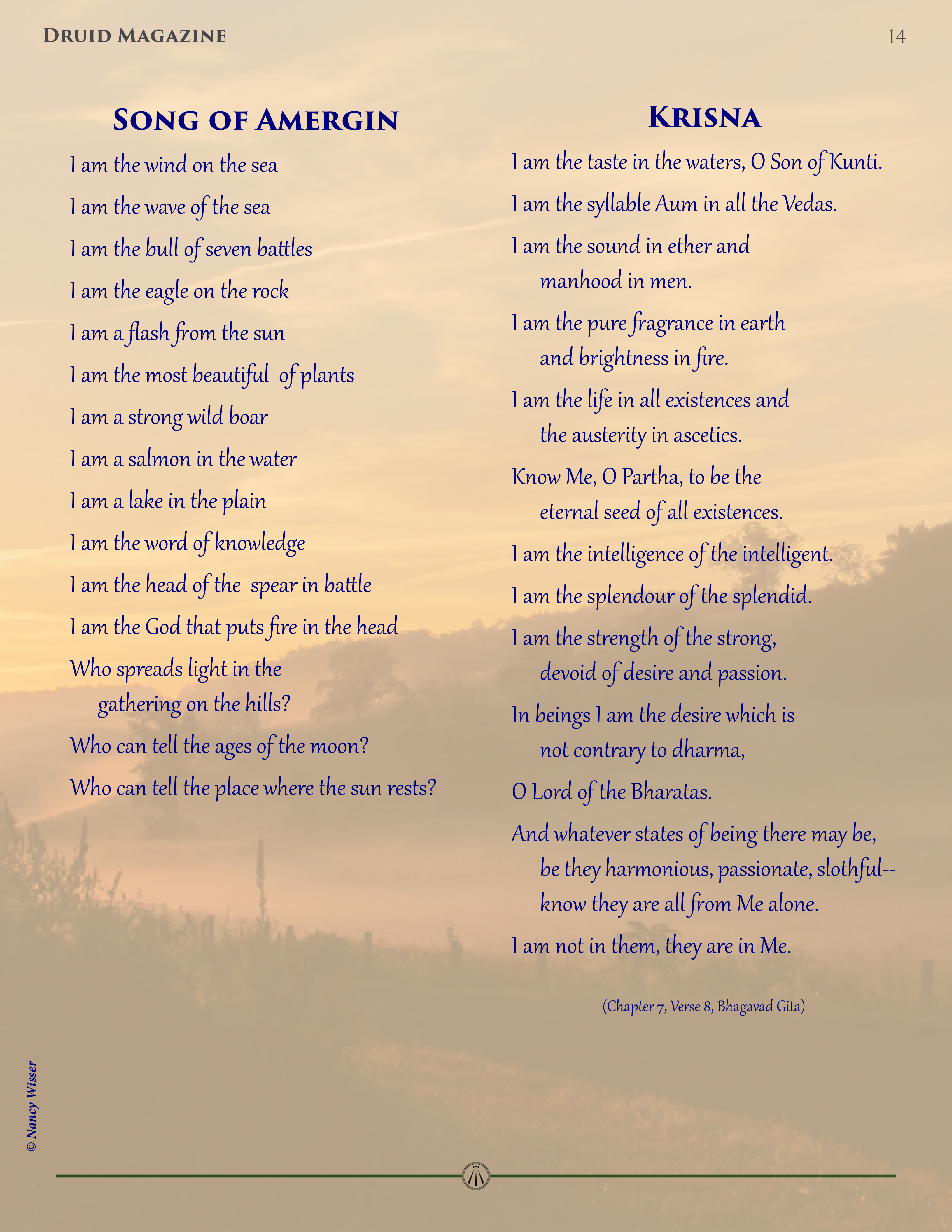
The Vedas say that the heavens were divided into 17 regions. In Irish mythology, the Druids advise Maelduin to take only 17 men with him on his famous voyage, and in the Book of Invasions[1], Mil arrived in Ireland in the 17th of the moon. The age of consent in early Ireland was 17 (Ralls, 2008).

Music & Poetry

Historian Bryan McMahon plays a game with every Indian guest he meets at his hotel in County Kerry, Ireland. He hums Irish folk music and asks the traveler to complete the tune (Hinduism Today, 1994; Ralls, 2008). Almost every time, Indian guests sing like they already know the song, indicating to him that Indians and Irishmen have a common past. Just as a slow ballad on the Celtic harp is reminiscent of an Indian raga played on a sitar, the ancient Celtic music form of *marbhnai*, also called "death song" or keening, has been compared with the raga style because both are improvised around three or four notes.

Both cultures valued music, sound, and vibration for its spiritual benefits and because it pleased the Gods. Irish music critic Fanny Feehan (1982) noted in a paper that when she played a Claddagh recording of *Barr an tSleibhe* for an Indian professor of music, her counterpart was transfixed by the eerie musical resemblance to an Indian raga about a young girl being lured toward a mountain.

Taking the arts further, we reach the common ground of poetry. Poetic verse was a revered force in both worlds. In the first part of this series, we talked about the epic poems of each culture. Both the Druid and Vedic Bards trained for 12 years and orated epics conveying spiritual knowledge. The poetic meter was a fixed syllable line, free form, with a three-part cadence at the end (Hinduism Today, 1994; Ralls, 2008). Both ancient societies had a class of poets who chanted in praise of their kings and warriors. Among the Druids, the Bards



SONG OF AMERGIN

I am the wind on the sea
I am the wave of the sea
I am the bull of seven battles
I am the eagle on the rock
I am a flash from the sun
I am the most beautiful of plants
I am a strong wild boar
I am a salmon in the water
I am a lake in the plain
I am the word of knowledge
I am the head of the spear in battle
I am the God that puts fire in the head
Who spreads light in the
gathering on the hills?
Who can tell the ages of the moon?
Who can tell the place where the sun rests?

KRISNA

I am the taste in the waters, O Son of Kunti.
I am the syllable Aum in all the Vedas.
I am the sound in ether and
manhood in men.
I am the pure fragrance in earth
and brightness in fire.
I am the life in all existences and
the austerity in ascetics.
Know Me, O Partha, to be the
eternal seed of all existences.
I am the intelligence of the intelligent.
I am the splendour of the splendid.
I am the strength of the strong,
devoid of desire and passion.
In beings I am the desire which is
not contrary to dharma,
O Lord of the Bharatas.
And whatever states of being there may be,
be they harmonious, passionate, slothful--
know they are all from Me alone.
I am not in them, they are in Me.

(Chapter 7, Verse 8, Bhagavad Gita)

© Nancy Wisser

are the shaman poets who teach through verse using the magic of sound in words, music, and song. Praise poems were called *narasamsi* in Sanskrit and *fursundud* in old Irish (Berresford-Ellis, 2000).

Amairgen, the warrior-poet son of the Celtic Iberian chief Golamh and the first Druid to set foot in Ireland, wrote a poem in the *Book of Invasions*[1] with a philosophic outlook that parallels a declaration by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* (Berresford-Ellis, 2000) (*see poems here*). Berresford-Ellis contends that the Amairgen poem is similar in style and content to the more ancient Sri Rudra chant of the Yajur Veda.

© Rajesh Dangi

Laws, Customs, & Training

Theories of a common origin for Druids and Hindus are further buttressed by the similarities in societal structure (Hinduism Today, 1994; Carr-Gomm, 2006). Celtic society was divided into a hierarchy: priests, warriors, and producers (including merchants). Upward progression through classes was possible. The Druids memorized the history and knowledge of the Celts and passed it on orally, forbidding written transmission. They were divided into several classes: seers, judges, royal advisors, hymn chanters, poet bards, and sacrificers. They were also astronomers, healers, and magicians.

Vedic society was divided into castes: priests, warriors, merchants, and workers (Hinduism Today, 1994). Upward mobility was sanctioned in Vedas, but later frozen in societal law books. The Brahmins, priests of the Vedic community, also memorized scriptural, societal, and legal knowledge of the Hindus, passing it on only verbally. Brahmins had several classes, including seers, royal advisors, medical, and cosmology specialists. In life stages defined by both cultures, enlightenment was sought after one had reached old age, and the ideal was to live 100 years. They also both recognized eight forms of marriage from arranged to love to abduction, and the groom conveyed a gift or money for his bride. The family unit comprised four generations from a great-grandfather.

There is an interesting parallel in debt law, according to Hinduism Today's (1994) extensive comparison of the cultures. A man who owed money in Celtic society could fast at the door of the debtor, who had to join the fast until he paid or they entered into arbitration. In Hindu law, a creditor could fast at the door of the past due debtor, who then had to protect the health of the creditor by paying the debt. In other practices, Druids utilized breathing, posture, and meditation techniques that resemble hatha yoga.

Common Ancestry?

Linguistic, archaeological, and genetic evidence support the theory of common ancestry. In addition, similarities in beliefs, spiritual practices, myths, symbols, laws and customs, traditions, holidays, and astrology all point to a link between the two spiritual practices and their members. Scholars have long puzzled over ancient maps and wondered how Hindus and Druids might have evolved from a common ancestor.

There are at least five origin theories from India to Africa, but only the Kurgan Hypothesis has not been summarily rejected—though it remains contentious (Kurgan Hypothesis, 2015). It suggests a common origin in the Pontic-Caspian steppe (Volk, 2000). This comprises the area north of the Black Sea, the Ukraine, and Southern Russia. In addition to the animal husbandry practices of the Kurgan people from the 5th millennia, linguistic, archaeological, and genetic evidence support the theory.

According to reconstructionists, the expansion of these nomadic tribes began during the Copper Age. They had a threefold division of priests, warriors, and peasants or farmers. The number five was sacred to these people as it is in Druidry. They had hill-forts, which could have been prototypes for the Celtic castle-hills. Their horse mythology links the Kurgans to both Eastern and Western cultures; both ancient Indian kings and the tribal kings of Ulster in Ireland consumed sacrificial horseflesh (Druid, 2016; Volk, 2000).

Conclusion

My investigation into a common ancestry is no longer a driving ambition because I have reached a point where it no longer matters to me to find evidence of what I know in my soul. I loved learning that I was not alone in my search for answers, and that seems to be conclusion enough for me. Learning early on that my own Druid order, OBOD, has identified and appreciated this connection validated my inner sense that I belong to both cultures despite my brown skin.

I enjoy the parallels that I continue to see (such as Druids using woad and Hindus using henna as natural dyes), but my spirituality has reached a place of acceptance that these faiths actually require no more commonality than the fact that I incorporate both into how I live and what I believe. In the end, it comes back to *dharma*. I choose to live my life with a combined faith that gives me many deities and energies to connect with, multiple communities of likeminded souls, and confirmation that humanity is more about similarities than differences, whether we grew from the same plant or we are different branches emerging from a Mother tree.

I hope you have enjoyed this exploration! If you are interested in conversation about Dharma and Druidry, please join our discussion group.

Notes

1. *Lebor Gabala Erenn*, known as *The Book of Invasions*, is the earliest known history written by the Irish. It recounts the successive invasions of Ireland by different tribes from the creation of the world to the coming of the Iberian Celts (Jones, 2010).

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SPIRITUAL VIDEO LIBRARY

There's a new library of conversations with mystical teachers including OBOD Chosen Chief Philip Carr-Gomm developed by Archetype Events. The company hosts spiritual events in Europe aimed at giving participants self-development, enlightenment, and reconnection with nature.

Their most recent workshop, The Shamanic Lands, featured Carr-Gomm and Caitlín Matthews among other notable teachers delivering wisdom and practical exercises on topics ranging from Druidry and Bardic storytelling to Celtic seership and geomancy. The upcoming event Plant Consciousness will involve re-establishing our connection to nature on both microcosm and macrocosm levels.

Click on the photo below for Carr-Gomm's talk on being one with nature. Other videos on the site, accessible here, include Danu Forest on tree spirit wisdom and Eimear Burke on what being a Druid means to her.

~Renu K. Aldrich

Being One With Nature
VIDEO
Philip Carr-Gomm

WORLD OF WONDERS
SHELLHENGE, KENT, U.K.

BY RENU K. ALDRICH

The Shell Grotto in Margate, Kent, is a 70-foot subterranean passageway covered in mosaics created out of 4.6 million seashells. Open to the public, the grotto's age and purpose have been a mystery since it was discovered in 1835, sparking numerous debates and theories. The site has recently benefited from restoration efforts by a not-for-profit trust. The winding passageway ends in a rectangular room called the Altar Chamber, and the grotto also features an arch leading to a central circular column known as the Rotunda. Shells used most frequently include mussels, cockles, whelks, limpets, scallops, and oysters, and they are expertly crafted to make shapes such as stars, suns, gods, the tree of life, and others considered to be influenced by Indian and Egyptian motifs. Regardless of its origins or purpose, the Shell Grotto is remarkable in its Awen-inspiring beauty and complexity.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Shell Grotto website

Wikipedia

Kent Archaeological Society

Ruminating blog

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Living Druidry

May I Have the Day Off to Go to Prison?

By Moss Magill

May I have the day off to go to prison? The supervisor of my day job has heard me ask this so many times that, by now, he has come to expect that I will not be in the office every third Thursday of the month. He knows that on those days I will be donating my time either at the Monroe Correctional Complex in Monroe, Washington or at the Airway Heights Correctional Center near Spokane. I am a volunteer in the Pagan and Druid prison ministry programs at both of these facilities. Every month three other colleagues from the Seattle Pagan and Druid communities and I design and deliver a seasonal liturgy and workshop for roughly 30 to 40 men who identify as either Pagans or Druids and are incarcerated in a minimum- and medium-security environment.

These men have been indicted for murder, robbery, rape, and other offenses, and yet we volunteer our time, energy, and gasoline to provide a resonant religious experience that reaches out to embrace and hold each one of them. Many ask us why we bother. According to the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life (Boddie & Funk, 2012), 73% of prison chaplains polled in America believe that prison ministry programs are "absolutely critical" to the success of an inmate's rehabilitation. A further 78% say that religious support is essential upon the offender's release from prison and re-entry into society to curb recidivism and help the person acclimate. According to the survey, 57% of chaplains observed improvements in the availability of religious programs in prisons since 2008 and 61% said prisoner participation in these programs has increased.

AIRWAY HEIGHTS
CORRECTIONS
CENTER

© Kamakani Schiess

Main entrance to the Airway Heights Corrections Center in Washington state

Although the poll also shows that a smaller number of chaplains feel that "religious extremism" is common or somewhat common, particularly among "pagan or earth-based" religions, the majority of those interviewed claim that "religious extremism seldom poses a threat to the security of the facility in which they work" (Boddie & Funk, 2012, para. #3). The chaplains with whom we partner at the Monroe and Airway Heights facilities have mentioned anecdotally that inmates who are allowed to practice the spiritual tradition of their choice are less likely to act out violently and/ or seek out gang memberships, which are notable problems on the inside. In my view, an allowance like this not only means a big win for the incarcerated, but also for the safety of the prison staff as well.

Additionally, it is well documented that inmates have sued correctional facilities under the First Amendment free-exercise clause for not including their particular spiritual pathway in the list of approved prison ministry programs (Hudson, 2002). Prisoners will occasionally win these court challenges, but the corrections facility is also granted a good amount of discretion, especially if it is deemed that a particular regulation is related to legitimate penological interests (see Turner v. Safley, n.d. and O'Lone v. Estate of Shabazz, n.d.).

In my experience, Druidry and Paganism have been accepted as legitimate religions in Monroe and in Airway Heights. At the Monroe Correctional Complex, the all-in-one-bucket term "Pagan" is used to define a diverse group of 30 to 35 incarcerated men who are exploring pathways such as Druidry, Wicca, Witchcraft, Asatru, Sumerianism, and Meso-American indigenous practices. There has been no attempt to compartmentalize these traditions into their own programs at Monroe, mostly due to the scarcity of volunteers who have stepped forward to provide individualized services. Therefore, my colleagues and I provide a general "Pagan" program every month in Monroe that is meant to satisfy a wide variety of interests within what we loosely refer to as a "neo-Pagan" context. It's a great challenge to provide an engaging service for all in the room, and it is an enriching opportunity for those of us who volunteer to learn about disparate, but analogous belief systems.

The Airway Heights Correctional Center, on the other hand, has a different arrangement. Although a general Pagan group is established and well organized there, it is erroneously labeled "Wiccan" as it includes men with a wider variety of interests and experiences. I have mentioned to the chaplain that a term such as "Pagan" would be more inclusive, but this suggestion was met with a shake of the head and an explanation that an act of God would have to start the paperwork necessary to get a prison policy changed. Unfortunately, this has been a common response for a few other requests that we have made, such as asking that a drum with a larger diameter be allowed in ritual.

On the other hand, Airway Heights does include Asatru and Druidry as separate religions and are equal to the others on the list, such as Native American, Buddhists, Ba-Hai, Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and several of the Protestant Christian variations. Each of these programs has a volunteer or set of volunteers who regularly enter the facility and provide services, rituals, workshops, and other forms of ministry to the men who sign up to attend. There are two local Witches in Airway Heights who administer to this "Wiccan" community on a regular basis. For the Druids, members of the Seattle-based OBOD seed group Circle of Coll (of which I am one) arrange a visitation twice a year to facilitate a seasonal ritual and corresponding workshop for about 15 participants. Two visits per year are not nearly enough, especially since the other religions meet significantly more frequently, but driving from Seattle over the Cascade Mountains to Airway Heights, Washington is really only feasible and safe during a relatively brief warm season.

Clearly, the Spokane area, as well as many other locales in the United States, are in need of more Druid volunteers. According to Chaplain Joseph Luce of the Airway Heights Correctional Center, "Just before Mid-Summer 2013, Seattle's Circle of Coll answered the call from several incarcerated Druid men here in Northeastern Washington State. Please try to imagine our relief at the blessing of fellowship we have been extended! We are no longer alone!"

That brings me back to the earlier question. Why do we bother spending our time developing rituals and workshops for convicted sex-offenders, murderers, arsonists, and committers of armed robbery? Why do we faithfully enter a minimum-to-medium security facility that is cloaked with razor wire into a world where everything is regulated with a strict time schedule (there's no such thing as Druid Standard Time in prison!), only to hear the heavy metallic sound of a bullet-proof door being sensibly locked behind us? My personal conviction is fueled by my steadfast belief that all of us, regardless of missteps we have made in the past, have the right to walk the spiritual path that we choose.

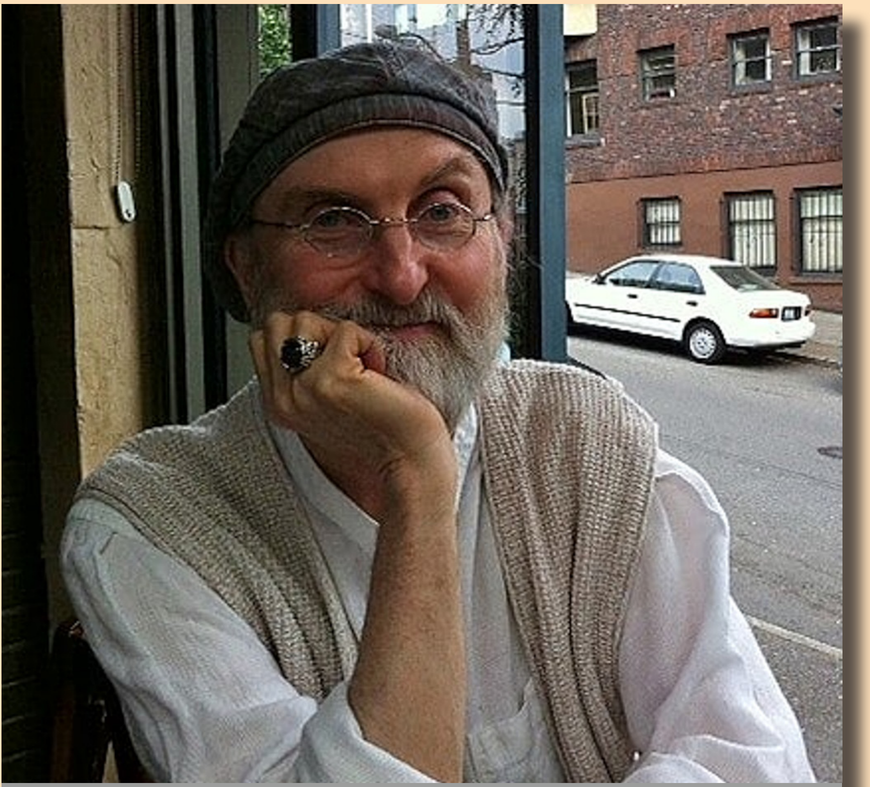
Non-traditional pathways like neo-Druidism have been legitimized by certain 21st century cultures and governments on the outside, and therefore mindsets like this should be reflected inside the prison walls as well. Additionally—beyond the moral obligation that I feel that prison chaplains have to provide safe spaces that speak directly to the hearts of all incarcerated seekers—there are the numbers that quantify the importance of a satisfying spiritual outlet in an otherwise unforgiving, devotionally arid, and harshly fluorescent environment.

An example of this research was published by Samuel Himelstein in the International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology entitled "Meditation Research: The State of the Art in Correctional Settings" (2011). This study affirms that meditation-based programs can provide effective treatment in prison environments to enhance psychological well-being and to decrease substance abuse and recidivism rates. This paper also asserts that approximately 70%

activities geared toward "traditional" religions. The challenge is to motivate individuals to attend the religious program of their choice, but first there must be a variety of choices available.

An even larger challenge that chaplains face in the United States is a shortage of volunteers who can facilitate alternative religious services and events. Further, many correctional centers have no access to Druid books, sacred items, and other resources that would round out an inclusive prison library and supply locker. The Circle of Coll Seed Group has stepped up. We not only provide in-person ministry, but also organize community donations, such as books, ritual items, sacraments, and funds. We have found that most of the incarcerated individuals who utilize these gifts are passionate about their spiritual work because it is, for many, the only lifeline that prevents them from falling into an unescapable, penal darkness. They are intelligent, sensitive, and seriously devoted to their own spiritual, emotional, and social rehabilitation. They are also hopeful that, upon their release from prison, they will find a devotional center of likeminded support on the outside. This could provide a huge advantage that would minimize re-entry back into confinement.

Logistically, it is surprisingly



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Author Moss Magill, editor of DM's Practical Druidry department

of released prisoners will be rearrested within three years, suggesting that correctional facilities are failing to provide proper rehabilitative care needed for the incarcerated to re-enter society successfully.

Himelstein's study (2011) shows that offenders who adopted a meditation practice were roughly 50% less likely to return to prison than control groups who did not meditate. Research like this indicates that introspection-based programs may increase hopefulness and optimism among prisoners while decreasing obsessive-compulsive behavior, anxiety, hostility, and recidivism. Therefore, it is imperative that a ministry featuring mindfulness activities, such as meditation, journeying, and trance work, be available to those offenders who would ordinarily reject effortless for the Druid community to become involved in this work. In Washington State, there are a good many prison chaplains who are being pressured by inmates and staff to expand their ministry programs to include more alternative spiritual programs. The largest barrier for me personally was an initial survivalist fear of placing myself in a penitentiary situation. This was immediately dispelled on the first day I spent with the men at Airway Heights. I never felt more welcomed and protected. As the chaplain told us that first day, it doesn't really matter what we do for the attendees. Our very presence with a listening ear is the greatest gift we can bring to this severe and oppressive setting.

Individuals or groups interested in developing a similar initiative could begin by first finding the nearest prison chaplain. Visit the International Network of Prison Ministries online directory to find telephone numbers, addresses, website links, and email addresses. Ask the chaplain of your choice for a donation approval request form to start the process for submitting book donations and other items. Each prison has its own set of policies, but it is likely that this form must be submitted and approved before any donations can be delivered.

Once you have built a rapport with the chaplain, don't be afraid to offer your services as a volunteer for a Druid or Pagan Ministry Program. There is a very good chance that the chaplain has no such arrangement but is being pressured to start one. If the prison is interested in your offer, you may be asked to complete a volunteer or sponsor training onsite or online. Again, each facility has different requirements so you should check with the chaplain.

OBOD has an excellent series of free booklets known as Beyond the Ninth Wave that can be ordered through its main office and that can be sent along with your donations. These publications offer a complete Druidic education, including the key ideas of Druidry, exercises, meditations, and rituals, geared toward an incarcerated audience. Of course, we at the Circle of Coll also can be a useful source of advice and support.

For most of us walking the Druid path, prison ministry (or any other ministry for that matter) is not our day job, and so we must ask for a day off or two to do this work. It has been rewarding for me personally. I know that several of the offenders with whom I meet monthly are anticipating the day when they will be allowed to step back into a free landscape without the concrete structure of a prison life. This is a terrifying free-fall for many and without the cushion of an established spiritual identity, this dive can end tragically.

These newly released Druids, Pagans, and others will be reaching out to those of us in established circles who can extend our hands in accord. We have the opportunity to influence real change in the lives of these individuals as well as those waiting to be released. Why do we bother? We bother because all lives matter and this is an underestimated community service that can be an enormous benefit to everyone.

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Moss Magill, editor of Druid Magazine's Practical Druidry department, has been a member of OBOD since 2006 and is co-founder of the Circle of Coll Seed Group. Moss has served as a Druid/Pagan Chaplain during the Occupy Seattle actions that began in 2011 and is now currently working with incarcerated Druids in prison ministry programs of Washington State.

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Stonehenge, Wiltshire, England

PUBLIC RITUAL WORKSHOP, PART IV-A:
RITUAL BODY, "VOICE"

BY DAVID NORTH

"Conscious control of the breath will destroy its sensitivity to changing inner states, and severely curtail the reflex connection of breathing and emotional impulse" (Linklater, 1976, p. 25).

Welcome back to our workshop on performing public ritual. Having discussed ritual roles and theory previously, we'll be focusing on delivery for the rest of the series. In these next two segments, we'll discuss aspects of the body in ritual performance (namely, 'voice' and 'movement'), and then we'll close the series with a chaotic assortment of mechanical fine points, oddly entitled 'ritual soul.'

You may recall my mentioning in the last issue that the art of ritual lies in delivery, and that the key to delivery is the skill and understanding of nuance that comes only with repetitive practice and rehearsal. Many people can easily pick up a script, read lines, and effectively communicate the intent of a ritual. However, bringing the full measure of beauty and power we all long for in the gift of ritual requires practice. I don't mean merely the practice in becoming comfortable with, or even memorizing one's lines, but the depth and sincerity of a natural voice that can be heard as well as felt deep within the soul.

DAVE'S RULES FOR RITUAL VOICE

1. YOU MUST BE HEARD
2. Even with yourback to the audience and a strong wind, YOU STILL MUST BE HEARD
3. You also must be honest

In Dave's rules for ritual voice *(see inset) heard* means "understood." A person mumbling into a piece of paper cannot be understood and leaves the other participants distracted and wanting. However, *heard* does not necessarily mean your words are "spoken." Someone recently related to me how their group performed an entire ritual without a single word being spoken: It consisted of only motion, dance, and lyric-less music but still clearly conveyed every ritual element.

Honest means "genuine and sincere." No matter how you choose to communicate, you must do so in the context of the moment and your role in the play. This is what lends soul to the delivery and makes the intent believable to those present. Being audible can be easy or hard depending on the circumstances, but a large outdoor gathering is going to be a challenge even at the best of times. The key is learning proper technique, and practicing until it is second nature.

My wife and I both project our voices very well during outdoor rituals, but we come to that ability from very different places: She was once a stage actress, and I was once a military officer. Stylistically, she has a graceful and articulate tone; and although I no longer bark orders, my delivery tends to be more direct. However, our techniques are similar in that we both move large volumes of air from our diaphragms (from the gut as opposed to the chest or throat).

But there is a right way and a wrong way to accomplish this! The instinctive (and incorrect) tendency is to tighten various muscles unnaturally and attempt to produce sound from the throat, typically producing a tense, flat effect that quickly tires the speaker and can damage the vocal chords.

Let's return at this point to the words of Kristin Linklater, the Scottish actor, author, and respected vocal coach quoted in this article's opening. In her book, Freeing the Natural Voice (1976), she describes natural breathing—not conscious muscular control—as the source and strength of the sound our bodies make. Furthermore, relaxation—most notably in the jaw, tongue, and throat—is the key to taking advantage of the body's natural vibrations and resonances to produce amplification.

Developing the ability to instinctively breathe, speak, and relax all at once, especially while in front of an audience, takes time and practice because most of us have taught ourselves to do it completely wrong and may have been doing it this way our entire lives. For those who are willing to invest the time, her book contains a myriad of useful exercises designed to help the reader develop proper breathing, natural sound, and voluminous projection.

© Dave North

Crane at Bewts y Coed;
Dave says, "Hey Damh the Bard, I found a crane upon those shores!"

Here are some homework assignments for those interested:

- Look up the definitions of elocution, eloquence, and enunciation.
- Using your outdoor voice, practice enunciating the different vowel sounds (a, e, i, o, and u). For instance, the 'a' in far, ate, hat…etc.

- Using your outdoor voice, practice enunciating deliberate consonants (the 't' in can't, the 'k' in book, the 's' in rituals…).
- With a group, take turns separating from the group by 20–30 yards or meters. Face away from the group and read a passage from some random book. Use the diaphragm to move air while invoking the relaxed, natural resonance of your voice and let the others judge how well they could hear you. Repeat.
- Practice as a group with common ritual elements. For instance, chanting the 'Awen,' reciting the Gorsedd Prayer, invoking the quarters—perhaps even perform an entire ritual.

You have several months to practice before the next installment, so no excuses! Until then, if you have any photos, drawings, or other artwork you feel express the spirit of ritual and would like to see them adorn the Ritual Space column, please feel free to submit them!

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David North is an Ovate Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, and facilitator of the Northern Virginia-based Seed Group of the Oak and Eagle. Among other things, he writes, edits, and participates in public rituals locally and regionally.

© Sophia Shultz

SAY WHAT YOU MEAN, AND MEAN WHAT YOU SAY

BY ZACK

Those experienced in writing ritual constantly emphasize intention. It is very important to keep our intention clear because it directs our magic along the course we wish it to take. But what does that entail? There are many factors, but one of the facets of this work that does not garner a lot of attention is *verbiage*.

Spoken word is a part of almost every ritual and spell, and it is the expression of our intention. The words we speak shape the way our magic will work, and determine if it will even work at all. Just as in conversation with a friend, we must abide by the little adage I personally try so hard to live by: Mean what you say, and say what you mean.

I like to use this example: I walk into a room and decide to try to brighten everyone's day a little. I want to show them that I appreciate and respect them so I go up to one person and say, "You look amazing today. Excellent choice of fashion." Then I go up to someone else stating, "I think you are a great person, and I admire your work." I give yet another person a casual "Lookin' good!" with maybe a borderline creepy wink. To another person I say simply, "I appreciate the opportunity to know you and I respect you greatly." Didn't I just show appreciation to each of those people? Did I not just moments ago make each of them aware of my opinion and do something to help boost their self-confidence? Of course. But I guarantee that only one of them would be clear about what my intended meaning was. Only one of them—the last one—is aware of exactly what they mean to me.

This is the same with the universe—it knows we want something. It knows we need help. But if we are unclear or inarticulate of exactly what it is we want or need, then it is relying entirely upon assumptions to manifest our desired result. The universe is willing to work with mages, but we must be competent enough to ask the universe how to actually manifest help. I don't think we need to ask for "exactly three weeks of healing and a week of bed rest" for a friend with a bad case of pneumonia. But simply saying, "Heal my friend" or, worse yet, "Make my friend better" (I have an entirely separate complaint on this one) are certainly not going to give you the best result. After all, perhaps your friend with pneumonia is also suffering from low self worth and has a noticeable but entirely manageable issue with dry skin. Imagine how frustrating it would be for you, having asked for your friend's healing, to walk into the hospital and find his skin to be perfectly smooth while his pneumonia has gotten no better! The point is this: It is worth our effort to give a precise and articulate set of instructions to the universe.

We must truly think on our words because they are an extension of our will. In the previous example, I would advise stating something like the following: "Spirit, my friend (name) is unwell. The ravages of (name of illness) are claiming their strength. I ask you lend (name) your strength to combat this ailment and bring (name) back to health, as soon as you might see fit." This verbiage is to the point, direct, and displays the tonality of a plea.

There are 3 basic guidelines for verbiage that I follow when writing ritual or when verbally directing my energy in any of the varied applications: meaning, clarity, and tone.

Meaning

Firstly, our words must reflect our intended meaning. For example, asking the universe for a "nice car" might get you a Maserati or it might also get you a Chevrolet that just refuses to quit on you. For that matter, you could get a car that doesn't produce a lot of smog. The Maserati may be considered "nice" because it is expensive and flashy while the Chevrolet is reliable and the third car is kind to the environment. Chances are, though, that you had only one of those things specifically in mind. Techniques such as rehearsal, brainstorming, or writing a rough draft can help the mage to fine tune a potentially vague statement.

Clarity

If we are unclear about our verbiage, then we are being unclear with the universe. To say that we want the universe to help us is just a bit different than asking the universe to protect us. Or shield us. Or guard us. If we simply ask the universe to help us, the universe may take it upon itself to decipher for you what you want help with. You may be expecting not to run into an ex with your new partner and instead get a $20 bill floating your way on the wind. By clearly and precisely stating what it is we are hoping to see, we are honing our thoughts more directly towards the purpose.

Tone

The delivery of the words should make sense. Don't muddy your meaning by sounding dramatic or important. Recently, I had a situation where I almost broke this rule by wanting to call a four-inch tall stone a "pillar." I liked the sound of the word: It rang true with the intended feel of the ceremony. The word sounds grandiose, noble, and powerful... but a four-inch stone does not make a pillar so I let go of my bravado for the sake of success.

Instead of trying to make things into something they are not for the sake of gravitas, get creative with phrasing. The stone may not be a pillar, but it could perhaps be a "sturdy altar of the (random direction)," or maybe even a "glistening crystal symbolic of the great and noble (spirit animal of your choosing).” I am not saying we must rob the imagination and fun from the working of ritual, but we should work to instill the same harmony and balance in our spellwork that we would in any other aspect of our life.

Do your rituals justice, do yourself justice. I have said it before and I will say it again. Say what you mean, and mean what you say.

After having studied Druidic teachings independently for around 10 years, Zack joined the ranks of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids. Zack, a Bard in the Order, uses his natural talents in service as a local healer and mediator in addition to being a trained and seasoned herbalist.

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THE MYSTERIOUS WOODEN STAFF

BY LEAFWISE RIVERDEEP

I saw it quietly standing there one night, tall and stately, towering nearly seven feet in the corner of my room, behind the hinged hollow door. In wonder, I drew it out to have a better look. Sanded smooth and nearly straight, the wooden staff was tapered and rounded at both ends, an inch-and-a-half diameter at its thickest. It almost looked like a teepee pole, thicker at one end with a small hole drilled through it. Striations of varying shades of dark and darker brown ran up and down in mottled swirled patterns. As awe slowly gathered within me, I stroked its smooth length and felt its loved-polished surface.

© JohnF

The author's "handful of mystery."

My hands fit comfortably around the staff, and so I carried it out to the center of my home. I had a sudden urge to extinguish all visible light and stand there, indoors with the staff vertically parallel and close to me. Grasping it with one hand above the other, I felt called to a taller attention. Outside, the dark of the night sky provided a faint stellar glow.

I closed my eyes and sank into the presence of this former tree branch. I sensed solid strength. The wood striations seemed as waves of energy, flowing up and down the staff. I imagined these waves shooting right out the top of the staff, high into the sky and likewise down into the earth seeking depths far below, like a giant magnet or lightening rod.

Riveted by this magnetism between sky and earth, I allowed myself to go into a meditative state, only occasionally opening my eyes and seeing the warm brown staff in my hands. I felt this standing staff meditation nourishing my entire energy field, body and beyond, in a harmony with all around me as if the staff were lending a grounding and expanding reverberation.

I only know too well how the trees love to assist us humans as they can. Once as a wandering teenager, I bedded down on a steep forested hill bracing my feet against a tree trunk to keep me from sliding down the hill. All night, I felt that tree supporting me, and remembered it in years to come. In subsequent years, many a traveler's tale or a myth that I heard carried themes of tree protection and their nurturing of humans. Many of us see faces in the gnarled bark of especially older trees… and sometimes we imagine and lean into their caring arms. Greek and Roman myths abound with trees who are wise, protective and loving.

The following day I called a possible owner of this staff, a woman who had performed a shamanic house blessing here when I moved in. Was it hers? No, and it did not belong to anyone else who subsequently came over… and anyway, I realized who would place a staff behind a rather permanently open door?

I welcome this mysterious gift, and its subtle gifts, such as turning off lights at night to do a standing meditation, or standing in reverence to our symbiotic relationship. I keep it now close to the center of my home where I notice its presence with quiet awe, my lighting rod between sky and earth.

Leafwise Riverdeep is a lover of mystery, forest and meadow, spiders and flowers, community and solitude, ritual and ceremony. In pursuing the life that she loves in urban Seattle, she gives gratitude to wonders that show up in unexpected ways.

© Brom Hanks

DRUID STAFF

BY FAUCON OF SAKIN'EL

Any traveler is wise to not travel alone, even though some trails narrow to but a heart's width and others are meant for solitude. So, a seeker should always carry a staff, which is more than stout support for balance or protection, but a friend that connects spirit to earth and beyond. If gaining understanding and wisdom is the goal of such a journey, then conceptually the staff will serve more in concert with pouch and scroll as is commanded by the ancient precepts of knowledge.

In Bardic fashion, I invite you to an allegorical contemplation of two staffs; one physical and the other ethereal. By this, a Druid Staff represents the core values and perceptions by which you will stand in life—solid and firm, yet alive and changeable by experience other than whimsy. As with its solid, wooden counterpart, this metaphoric Druid Staff can be appraised for strength, reach, flexibility, and beauty.

STRENGTH

Representative of character and self, a personal staff contains a central core of unchangeable commitment to a measure of honor, integrity, and principles that can withstand the assault of perversity and allure. Around this characteristic is a more pithy sheath of values and beliefs that cushions the frictions of daily life; this presents a more resilient form for others to grasp yet it is slightly vulnerable to change and sloughing away.

Around this core of identity is a "thick skin" for protection—perhaps amazing in texture and pattern, but essentially a barrier against casual assault on the inner cores. Lovers and critters alike may attempt to "get under your skin" so learning to tell the difference between these assailants is often a test of compassion, empathy, and fear.

REACH

'Tis said a man's reach should exceed his grasp, but this must be tempered with reasoned judgment. A soul quest should never shuffle beyond the reach of what brought you here, nor aspire to more than can be integrated with who you are. While you may probe into the unknown as if testing a bush for snakes, one can then surge backwards into memory for a fine braiding of new experience with the core of strength.

In Mongolian Shamanism, a goal is to reach Tegsh, or balance, so one should grasp the staff such that the wider "probing" end is in relation to the shorter section in similar relationship to our personal probing and our reach. The probing should be into "what has come before," with the shorter end as but an exploration of possibilities. Thus the dream never draws beyond what the soul can balance.

no future path might support

that which your character
cannot sustain,

while those of whom mind and spirit

are balanced in heart and earth

will find any trail lined with fruit,

and any dream a goal.

(faucon of Sakin'el, 2008, p. 54)

FLEXIBILITY

Just as a tree that is too rigid might break in the wind or be torn from stability for want of deep roots, a Druid Staff must be able to sway in the breeze or bend in mediation. The vital center core will sustain much like a spiritual note. While values may yield and the protective skin peel away, these can be healed and scars valued as lines on the face of a crone. But even a flexible shaft will lead to folly if only poked and jabbed in an aim based only on what has worked before.

Your seeking must be allowed to swing about and vibrate a bit like a hound dog following a scent. The balanced reach in tune with Phi (the eternal life constant) will prevent the staff from being knocked from your will and help it to rebound from fruitless paths of yearning. Your Druid Staff is always in vibrant motion, never still, as if conducting a symphony.

BEAUTY

Many people anoint themselves with aromatic oils or inscribe symbols on carved figurines in private symbolism of the inner self through make-up, false persona, and posturing. But, as such beauty is artificial, information gained from strength or reach or flexibility may also prove feckless and values changed on this accord are based upon a delusion. If, instead, you strive for an inner beauty founded in congruency, such that "who you are" and "who you are perceived to be" project the same thing, then another may grasp your staff in confidence and pull you from the bitter swamps of complacency. I assure you, my friend, that nothing is more beautiful in the march of time than a seeker open to any path, striding onward in measured steps, with a solid staff both leading and following—forward two, back one, spin about, and try again.

When you walk a mountain path of doubtful footing, an approaching stranger might well note your skillful use of a physical walking stick. They might make valid judgments of your prudence, character, values, and courage. Your chosen "earth-based" journey may be from believing to certitude, from here to there in lifestyle, or spiritually from without to within. Many strangers will be met along the way. They will not see a physical staff, but can "feel" your Druid Staff by every word you speak and through the respectful silence of listening. You undoubtedly have knowledge and truths worth sharing. Wait until the stranger asks, “From where comes your presence and courage?” Only then, with Druid Staff in hand and heart, do you begin.

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faucon of Sakin'el. (2008). *Paths of Lemuria*. Author

faucon is protector of a primordial area known as Shernai with woods, streams, trails, deer, turkey, fox, and more. Limited guests share the glyn for spiritual inspiration, writing, song, and celebration in connection with North Carolina’s Grove of the White Oak, which is affiliated with the New Order of Druids.

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WORKING (WITH) BEES

BY JOSEPH RIELINGER

I am a beekeeper working in a beehive, but I am not the only worker. The vast majority of the bees in the hive are worker bees. No bee is without a job, and there are many jobs to do in a hive. The hive hums with well organized and cooperative activity. I can marvel at the pace of work and the efficiency. I look at each worker and see an individual contributing to the function of the hive.

All worker bees are female, but the similarity ends there. They are not clones, but sisters and all daughters of the queen. Each is a unique being and each hive is different because of the personalities of its workers.

Each worker begins her career as a household bee; her job is to clean out cells, repair cells, and keep the hive clean. She removes the bodies of her dead sisters and the cocoons of the newly hatched then seals the hive with propolis (a natural antibacterial and antifungal material like caulk). Because of their work, the beehive is the cleanest and most sterile environment in nature (Root, 2007, p. 576-578). I open each hive, and if it does not smell like fresh beeswax and honey, I know there is a problem with the health of the bees and the colony.

After a time, the worker bee changes jobs (through an unknown mechanism) and becomes a brood nest worker. She feeds and removes the waste of the queen and feeds the larvae as it grows.

© Joseph Rielinger

A cluster of bees on the outside of the hive.

When larva makes its cocoon, the worker puts a wax cover on the cell to protect the cocoon. She keeps the nest at exactly the right temperature and humidity by fanning with her wings or shivering to make heat. As part of my job, I look in the hive to check that she is doing her job with the eggs and larvae.

Later in life, each worker changes jobs for a second time. She now works to store food and protect the hive by filling the cells with honey and pollen—an especially important job when preparing for winter. When the honey reaches the proper level of water content, she caps it with wax to keep the honey clean. She also protects the nest from intruders, killing or scaring off any insects or animals that come within a certain distance of the nest. When I look at the frames of the hive, I check that the stored honey and pollen are enough for the hive to be ready for winter.

© Joseph Rielinger

The inside of a hive showing the frames.

Toward the end of her life, the worker bee changes jobs one last time. Now she is a scout and forager. These are the bees everyone sees flying about the land. She looks for flowers and water. When found, she returns to the hive for the famous "bee dance" to notify the other foragers of the location of the food and water. She stores nectar in a special sac in her abdomen and pollen in sacs on her legs. Heavy with forage, she returns to the hive to provide for the queen and her sisters. I look at the entrance to the hive to see the workers leaving and returning.

Although the worker bee changes jobs throughout its life, there is no specific schedule to career change. The workers change jobs automatically, knowing somehow what is needed in the community. Sometimes, they may even revert to an earlier job if that is what the hive needs. With each career change, the worker's physical body changes as well so she has the right tools for the job, such as wax and propolis glands, jelly glands, and forager sacs. The worker bee is a team player and pitches in where and when needed.

The result of her work is an organized society and a natural economy. The workers collectively create a home that is warm, dry, and clean. Each bee is adequately fed, and each egg is nurtured. Her needs met, the bee seems content. Bees only leave a hive when their needs are not met or if they become queenless (Root, 2007, p. 787).

© Barb Pott

Author Joseph Rielinger

As a beekeeper, I am a member of the hive, too. The workers know who I am and accept my intrusions. I also work to make sure they are warm, dry, and fed as well as protected from disease and predators. The hive has honey to share with me as long as I leave enough honey for the hive to survive. I am a member of the hive and must act as another worker; I must do my work selflessly and share with my fellow workers. If I exploit them, the bees will swarm and leave an empty hive behind.

I look with wonder at the bee hive. The bees have a complex society, which provides an industrial surplus without internal competition. All the worker bees cooperate for their mutual benefit. I follow the teaching of nature and work with the bees. I am just one worker in the hive helping it be strong and productive. Finally, I thank the hive and its workers for sharing their bounty with me.

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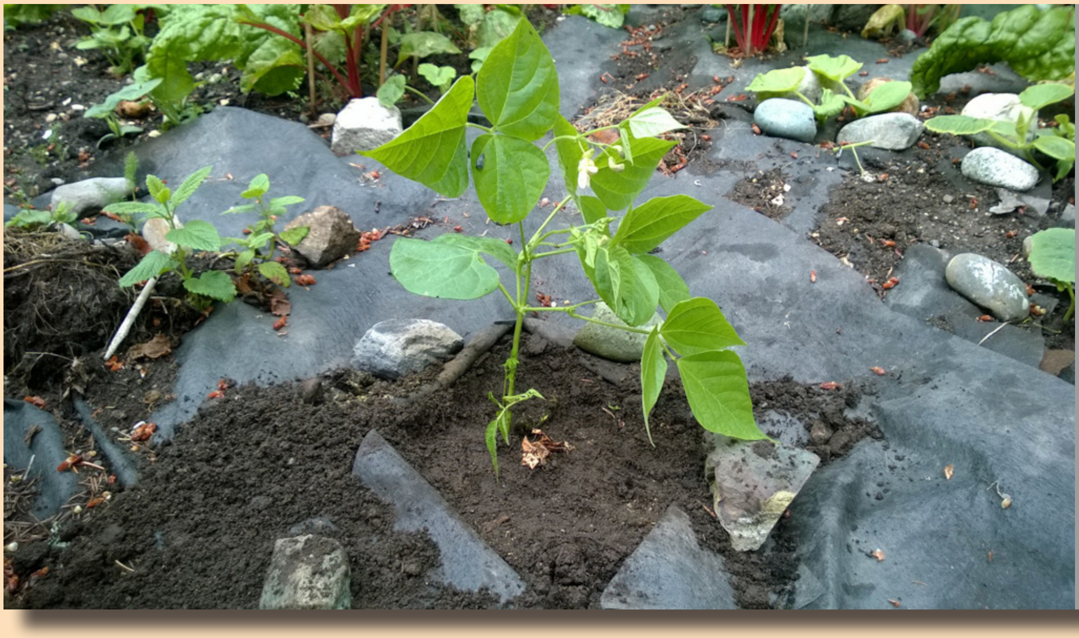
Joseph Rielinger is an OBOD Ovate who finds spiritual connection with nature in beehives. He and his bees work together in Northeast Ohio.

GARDENING WITH BLACK FABRIC

BY MOSS MAGILL

Gardening in the Pacific Northwest has its own set of challenges, one of which is maximizing our relatively short growing season. Putting things in the ground during the month of May is pushing it due to the soil still being cold and a limited number of sunny spring days. Hearty things, such as kale and chard, are always the first things that get planted in our garden right around Beltane. We also throw in some peas and beans with hopes that we will have a harvest by Alban Hefin. Tomatoes, corn, basil, and other favorites usually have to start in the greenhouse until the ground warms up sometime in July, and even then, we hope they will provide a yield before the chilly weather starts rolling in with the month of September.

One of the things my husband and I have been experimenting with over the last couple of years is the use of dark fabric to warm up the soil during those precious sunny days that are so rare during the Pacific Northwest springtime. We place it on the ground like a cozy blanket and then plant our starts in X-shaped slits that we cut into the cloth. Since dark colors absorb heat, the sun not only raises the temperature of the ground beneath the fabric, but also helps keep the soil warm when the clouds come around and also after dark when night falls. At least that's our theory. We haven't considered this scientifically, nor have we taken the temperature of the soil we are working with, but we have noticed that the vegetables that are warmed by our method seem to be happier (i.e. they grow more quickly and appear to be healthier) than the same kind of plants that are placed in the ground without a covering. The added benefit to using cloth in this way is that it also controls weeds without herbicides. We



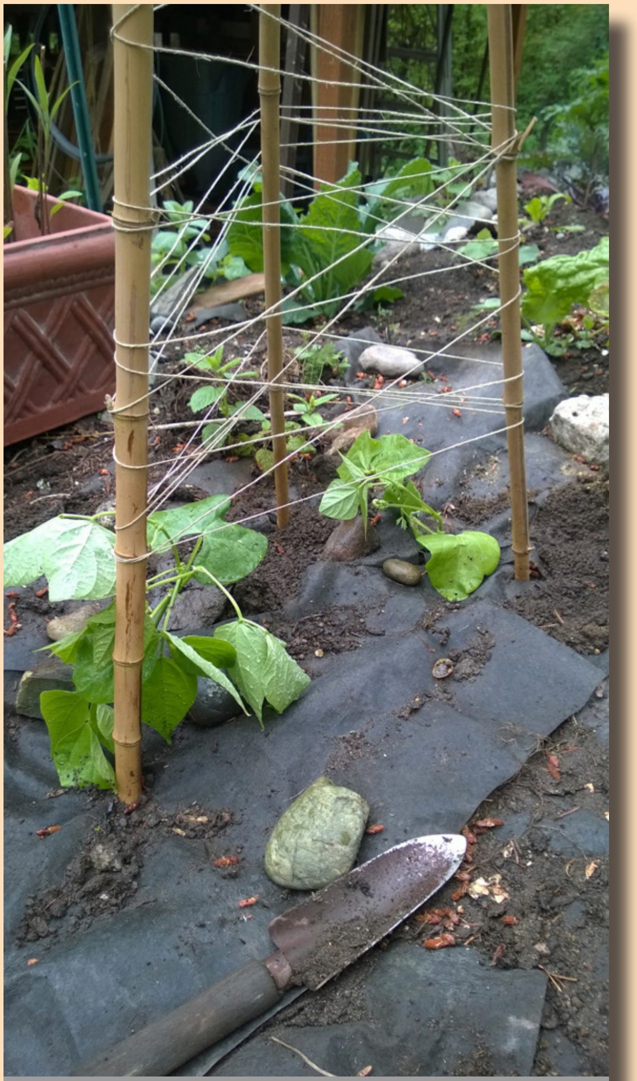
© Moss Magill

Bean start in the ground before triangular flaps are replaced recommend, however, weeding the area thoroughly by hand before placing the fabric. The cloth will then block the sunlight around the vegetables that you have planted, stunting any further growth of competing flora.

We have experimented with all sorts of materials to use as our ground covering, such as newspaper and cardboard. We have even spread gargantuan rhubarb leaves around our vegetables, mostly to deter weeds from growing. Then we found what is known as landscape cloth in the gardening store, conveniently packaged in rolls. This material is designed to let air and water pass through it while killing weeds, especially when topped with a layer of mulch. We found, however, that if the black fabric is left in the sun without a mulch layer, the dark color acts like a radiator, raising the temperature of the soil that it covers.

Omitting the mulch also allows the ground below to breathe and does not discourage essential earthworm activity. Commercial landscape cloth is unwoven and won't unravel when cut. You could also use black cotton cloth or dark burlap if you don't mind the loose threads and the fact that these materials tend to deteriorate over time.

Once we spread the fabric over the bed, we hold it down with small stones along the edges and corners. We then cut an X-shaped slit in the cloth in the place where the start will be planted. We peel back the four triangular flaps formed by the slit and hold them down with more stones. This exposes a square shaped area of bare dirt so that a hole can be dug with a trowel. We like to sweeten the soil with a little bit of compost, alfalfa meal, and bat guano before lowering the plant into the hole. Once the start is planted, the dirt is put back and tamped down; the four triangular flaps can be replaced and held down with stones. We then water as usual satisfied that we perhaps have just extended our growing season a little further.


© Moss Magill

Triangular flaps have been replaced and the beans are ready to climb!

See Moss Magill's other article in this issue as well as his bio by clicking here.

Wise Gardening 101

By Lyle Almond

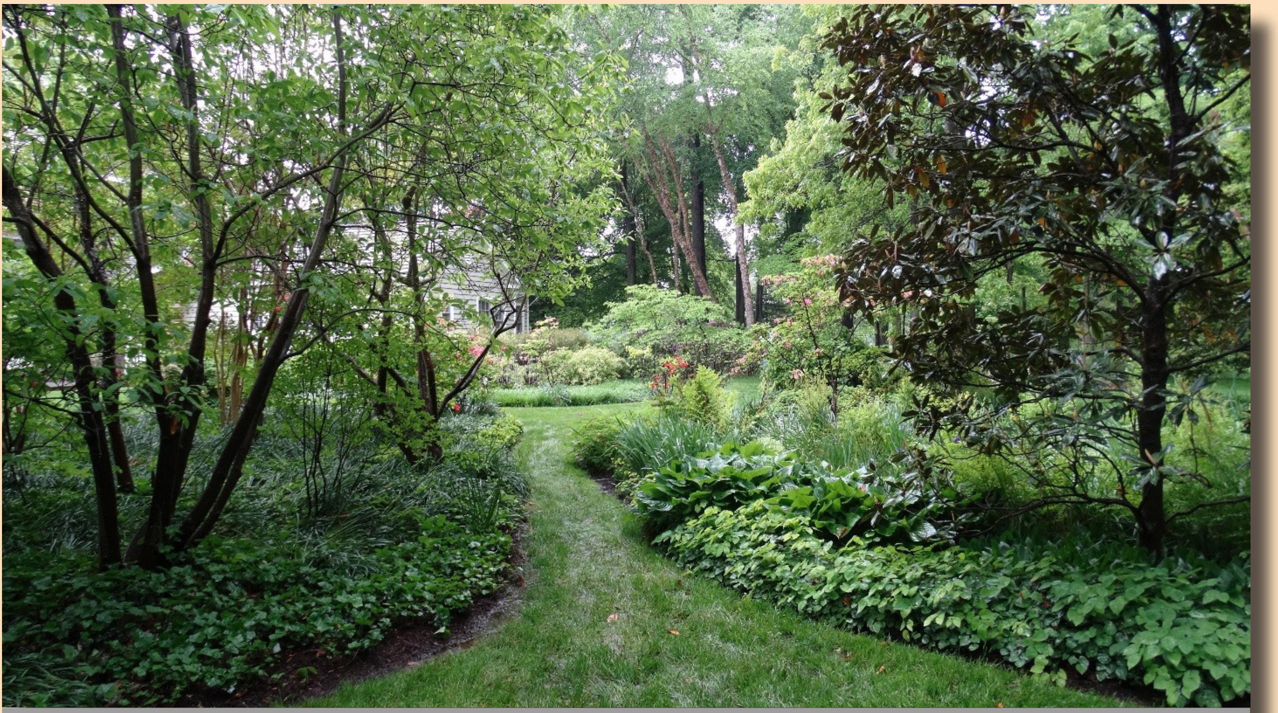
The Ecological Aesthetics of Conservation Landscaping

Among the primary elements of designing landscapes that cultivate and honor our relationship with nature, the most important is the ability to grasp and integrate landscaping practices that simultaneously benefit the environment and function efficiently as well as aesthetically for our use and well-being. Coming to terms with how these three concerns are inextricably tied together has led me to understand that conservation (aka ecological) landscaping is not just another way to garden; over time, we come to understand that this is *why* we garden.

But why should we worry about aesthetic concerns when the important thing is to attract pollinators? (To which I might respond, what about designing the temporal layering effect of bloom sequencing over the course of the growing season? Or combining flower color with leaf textural design?) Or, you may ask, why should I plant natives when what I want is 'color' in my garden? Why should the vertical layering of foliage matter when, for me, the purpose of ecological design is to control storm water runoff and protect water quality? To begin appreciating how closely ecological, aesthetic, and utilitarian performance values are interwoven with one another, it's helpful to begin with the now universally accepted model of the triple bottom line.

In Druidry, triplicity abounds. The symbol of Awen features three columns of light, the triskelion ritual is carried out along three pathways representing Sky, Sea, and Land (Hughes, 2014), and the Triple Goddess represents feminine divinity in its three-fold aspect (Graves, 1966). It should, therefore, be very easy for us to transpose this pattern to many other practical features of our lives.

In every act we perform, there is always an environmental consequence either positive or negative, an economic cost or savings, and a social or cultural impact. When we consciously seek to improve any one of these values, we simultaneously improve the other two. For example, if I choose to remove a small area of invasive plants from a corner of my garden by hand using manual garden tools, not gas-powered tools or pesticides, I'm not only reducing the environmental impact of introducing chemical pesticides into the ecosystem, I'm saving considerable amounts of money in the cost of driving to the store and purchasing chemical pesticides. I'm also creating several social benefits as well, such as exposing myself to natural beneficial gut flora, spending time outdoors on my hands and



© Lyle Almond

Minimize lawn areas to provide functional—and aesthetic—walkway access by incorporating the natural sinuosity of curving lines.

knees, and making my garden not only more healthy, but more beautiful. Here are ways I suggest everyone can attend to the triple bottom line.

Garden wisely: Start with design in mind

Conservation landscape design occurs in the context of nature. The goal is to make the best use of your site's existing natural features rather than impose major alterations to the existing landscape, such as moving large volumes of soil to re-grade the site or installing huge bioengineered structures to alter drainage patterns on the site. Landscape design is the initial investment that allows you to make the most of what already exists on the site by preserving, enhancing, and reducing impacts on what's already in place without expending excessive resources to make changes. So before you back your car up to the nearest box store and stuff it full of plants and every garden tool and product imaginable, start with the end in mind and consider the following actions.

1. Perform a site analysis.

Consider the character of the site (or regional attributes), historic uses of the land, soil types, geology, sun, water, natural plant communities, and the environmental features on adjacent properties. Environmental features might encompass a uniquely descriptive range of natural conditions, such as a 'moist glade in dappled sunlight' or a 'dry oak bracken fern knoll' (Slattery et al., 2013).

2. Choose your goals for the landscape.

Consider any specific actions required and resources you will need that are related to those goals. Then, plan a landscape that considers the following issues while considering your goals and needs:

- Landscaping with native plants
- Managing control of invasive plants
- Providing wildlife habitat
- Promoting healthy air quality
- Conserving and cleaning water
- Promoting healthy soils
- Conserving precious resources and protecting the environment

If your landscaping project is complex, it is especially important to pay attention to the separate phases of the project and their sequencing. For example, don't put the landscape in before underground utility lines are installed, mount nesting box posts before planting groundcovers, and in general install hardscape elements (trail designs, masonry, carpentry, plumbing, electrical, etc.) before installing soft landscape elements (i.e., plants).

3. *Create, restore, and preserve existing environmental features.*

Focus on opportunities to restore degraded environmental features as much as possible. For example, you might devise an invasive species management plan for an onsite woodland, add to the species diversity of a degraded wetland, or build links between existing isolated habitats. Take advantage of opportunities to create new environmental features. Some examples include transitioning your landscape into adjacent natural areas or creating a new habitat feature such as a small pond (Slattery et al., 2013). The take-home message here is to find ways to link adjacent natural areas or transition into them. A good way to begin is to find ways to keep lawn areas to the minimum size and shape needed for function:

> Conventional lawns are composed of alien invasive plants, such as tall fescue, that have high maintenance requirements in terms of water input, fertilization, and herbicide use. However, because they provide a smooth surface for certain recreational activities, a poor habitat for ticks and other pests of concern, and because the look of lawn is so strongly expected from some members of the community, even conservation landscapes often need to contain some lawn to be functional. Therefore, consider the extent to which any conventional lawn that must be present can be maintained with minimized input without compromising function. (Slattery et al., 2013, p. 3)

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Lyle Almond is a member of the Oak and Eagle Seed Group, a Bardic Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, and lives in the woods outside Chestertown, MD.

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TREATING VERTIGO WITH HOMEOPATHY

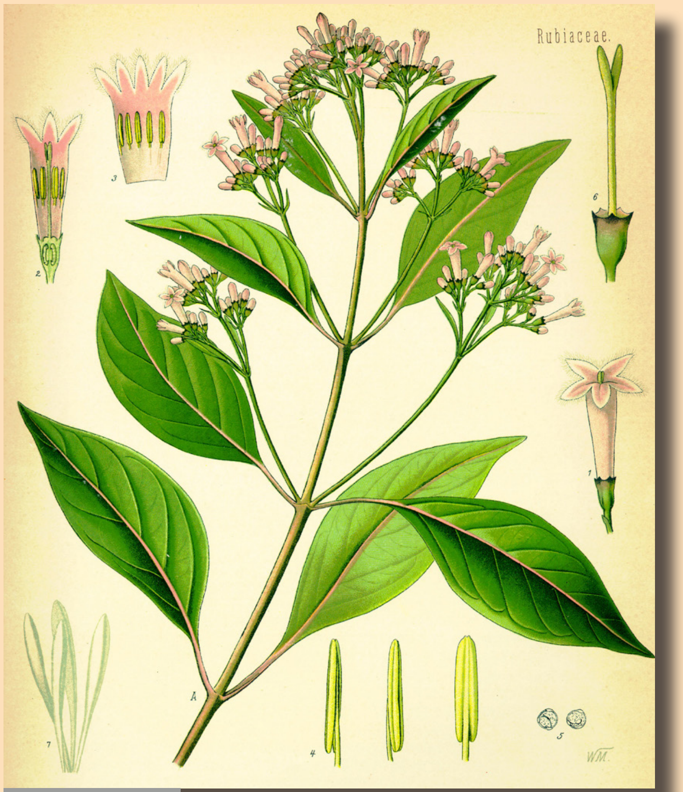
BY SHELLEY KENEIPP

I am addressing a condition called vertigo in this issue because I had a request to do so. This condition can be quite hindering and wreak a lot of havoc in one's life. There are not many options for treatment so homeopathy can be quite beneficial, producing fast results with no negative side effects to worry about.

Acute vertigo manifests as dizziness, wooziness, involuntary eye movements, loss of balance, and/ or spatial distortion. This can produce a sensation that a person is whirling about, has a lack of coordination, or the room is spinning. These symptoms can happen when one is lying completely still. Vertigo is due to a malfunctioning of the balance apparatus of the inner ear. Acute vertigo can be due to a virus or allergy in the inner ear causing an excess of fluid build-up of mucus. The excess fluid in the semi-circular canals of the ear causes a signal to be sent to the brain. The brain interprets that the body is experiencing an unfamiliar movement pattern, though that is not what is really happening. If this is the case, you may be diagnosed as having a condition called "vestibular neuronitis" or "acute labyrinthitis."

Besides having a build-up of fluid in the inner ear, acute vertigo can be caused by dehydration from getting overheated and sweating a lot, fevers, or long bouts of diarrhea and vomiting. Replenishing fluids along with taking a remedy will usually alleviate this condition. Acute vertigo can also be due to motion sickness.

Chronic or severe vertigo can become quite incapacitating. It can manifest with bouts of unrelenting nausea and vomiting, involuntary eye movements, anxiety, heart problems, severe compromised circulatory disruptions, brain dysfunction (especially in the elderly), head injury, suspicion of a stroke, ringing or other noises in the ear, or difficulty with motion. Anyone with these symptoms should be evaluated by a health care professional. It is important to pay attention to these symptoms because they could indicate a deeper condition that needs assessment and attention. Drugs such as some antibiotics, anti-depressants, and medication for blood pressure, pain, and chemotherapy can actually cause vertigo and an array of other side effects. Make sure first that the vertigo is not being caused by such medications. This is true of over-the-counter medications as well, although Western medicine has very few effective treatments for chronic vertigo.



China officinalis

Many times, vertigo is mistaken for faintness, otherwise known as pre-syncope. These experiences and sensations can encompass feelings of faintness, light-headedness, or giddiness. This is usually caused by a drop in the blood pressure, which causes a deficiency of blood to reach the brain. The body will fall down if the person tries to rise so that more blood can flow to the brain.

Treatment for Acute Vertigo

Once a person has taken a homeopathic remedy, dizziness will be the first symptom to disappear as the blood supply is restored to the brain. Here are first-aid homeopathic remedies that can be used to treat the following common conditions associated with acute vertigo:

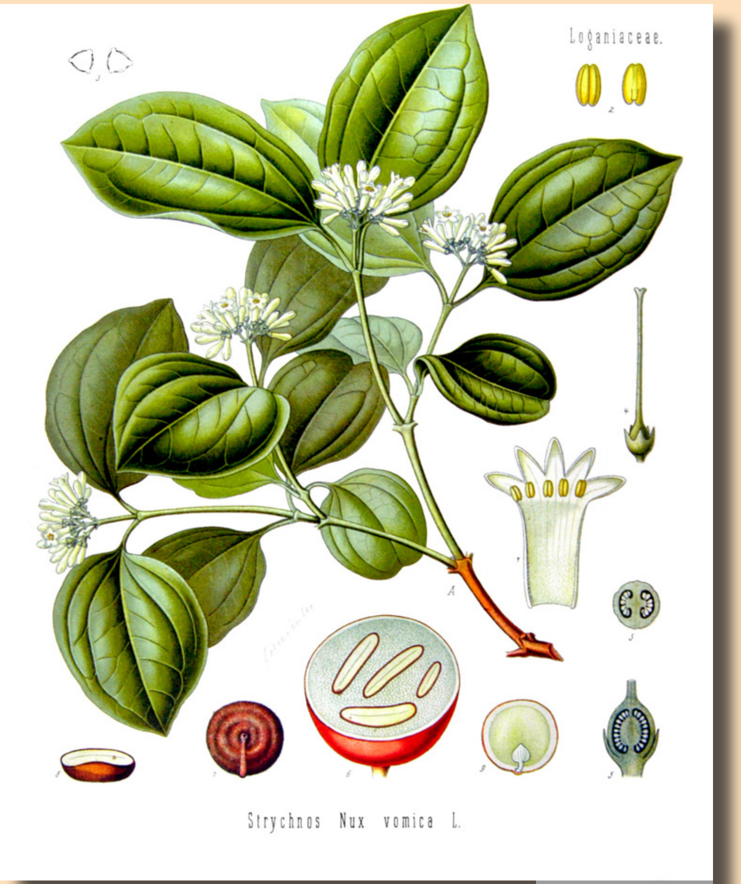
Aconitum napellus: Onset from a fright, shock, loss of blood, or fever. Vertigo on rising from bed or seat, stooping, moving, or shaking the head. Vertigo with an inclination to fall to the right side. Sensation of intoxication or dizziness in the head.

Bryonia alba: Onset from a virus. Vertigo with nausea, confusion, dizziness, or faintness on rising up. Sensations that they are sinking deep down in the bed and all objects are whirling about. The slightest motion makes vertigo worse. Everything in the body feels very dry; for example, eyes, mucus membranes, mouth, and skin. They will feel better with applications of cold air or liquids.

Calcarea carbonica: Vertigo with a tendency to fall to the left, right, or backward. Also when suddenly turning the head, looking up, overexertion, going up stairs quickly, or ascending a long set of stairs.

China officinalis: Onset from an exhausting bout of diarrhea or vomiting. Vertigo with dizziness while walking, or when they fall backward. They are very weak from loss of fluids. Feeling of faintness with ringing in the ears. They may have a headache with a sensation of the brain swashing to and fro. The brain can actually feel bruised.

Cocculus indicus: Onset from sea and car sickness or from high stress, overwork, or loss of sleep. Vertigo with nausea and sometimes vomiting. The sensation of vertigo is felt in the forehead area. It is worse in the morning, on sitting up, and raising the head. Many times, there are palpitations in the heart. May have a headache with a sensation of hollowness or emptiness. Symptoms include the head feeling heavy and maybe trembling in addition to chills.



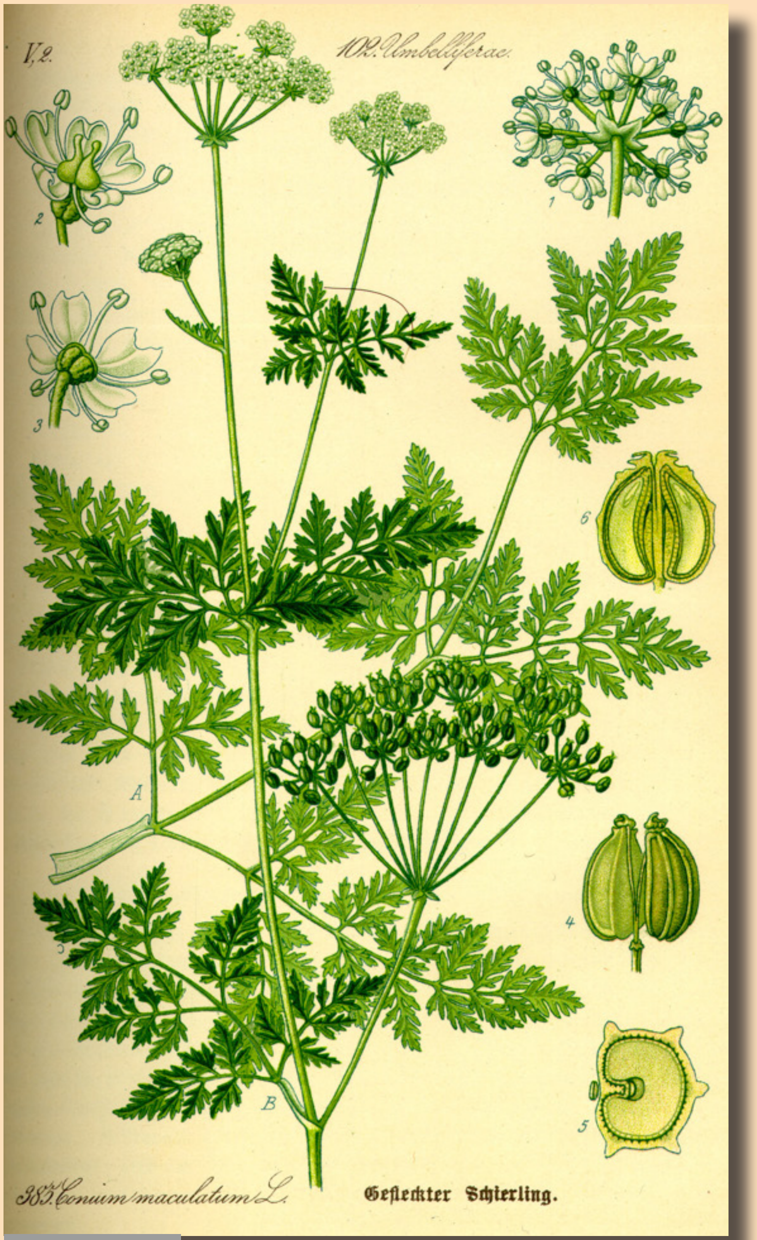
Nux vomica

Conium maculatum: Onset from motion sickness or in the elderly. Vertigo when lying down and turning over in bed, turning head sideways or turning eyes, shaking head, slight noises, or hearing others talk. Tendency to fall to the left side.

Gelsemium sempervirens: Onset from a virus. Vertigo spreads from the back of the head. They act and look as if they are drunk and will stagger when they try to move. Vertigo with dizziness, blurred vision, and light headedness. The condition is worse with any sudden movement of the head and walking. Symptoms include chills, an accelerated pulse, dullness of vision, or double vision.

Nux vomica: Onset from dehydration, after smelling strong scents, bright lights, too much mental exertion, stress, or overconsumption of food, alcohol, tobacco, or drugs. It feels as if the brain and other objects are turning in a circle. There can be a momentary loss of consciousness. Vertigo is worse in the morning. They feel intoxicated, and also may have a headache and nausea.

Petroleum: Onset from carsickness or sitting in a traffic jam on a hot day breathing exhaust fumes. Vertigo with a swinging or swaying sensation that produces nausea and or vomiting. It feels like being sea sick. There is a feeling of heaviness. Vertigo on rising that is felt in the back of the head.



Conium maculatum

Pulsatilla nigricans: Onset from being too long in a hot environment, dehydration, or after strain from lifting too heavy of a weight. Everything seems as if it is turning. Vertigo that is worse when sitting up or looking up. This vertigo can also get worse during menses. They are nauseous with gastric complaints. They feel better in open air.

SUPPORTIVE MEASURES

If they are dehydrated, they should replenish the body with a good amount of non-sugary fluids. It is best to not stand up, so the brain can get more blood flowing to it. There are also exercises that have helped people. Health care practitioners may have a list of these exercises and how to do them. An osteopath who does cranial osteopathy can be quite helpful in alleviating symptoms and rebalancing the system. Also, there are certain maneuvers that a professional can perform to give relief from the symptoms.

DOSAGE

Put two pellets in the lid of the remedy vial and place under the tongue every 15 minutes for the first hour at the first sign of vertigo. Follow with hourly doses until resolved, but do not take remedy if vertigo is getting better. Repeat only if there is a return of symptoms. After taking a remedy six times with no alleviation, choose a different remedy. Keep all remedies away from children, electronic equipment, cell phones, and out of the light. Do not touch the remedy or the lid of the remedy vial. If three or four pellets come out of the vial, it is okay to take them immediately. But you only need two pellets per dose.

Shelley Keneipp is the author of The Parent's Guide to Homeopathy, *North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California, 2015.*

TRIBAL FAMILY

BY KEN MULLER, FAUCON OF SAKIN'EL

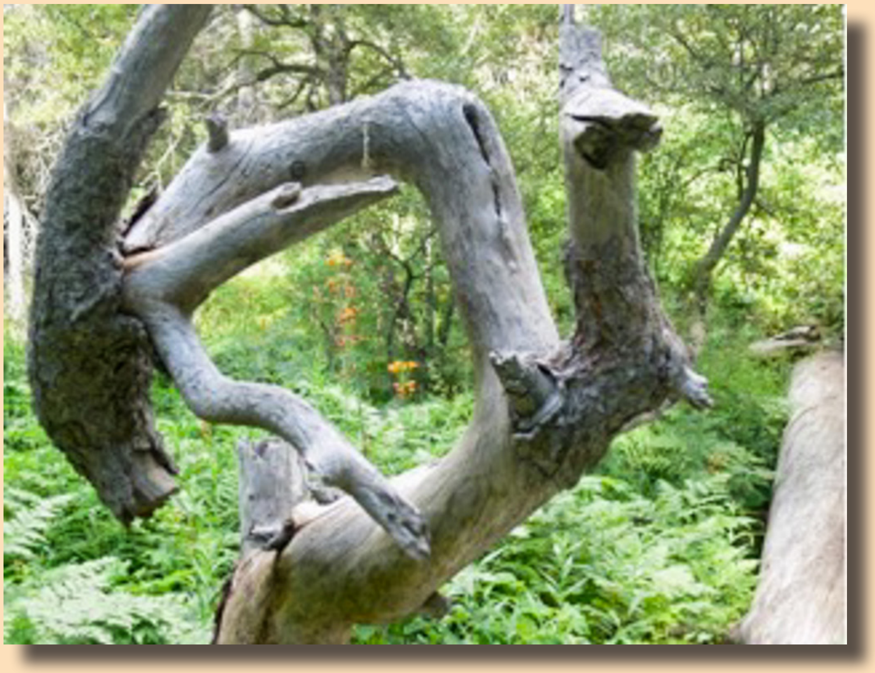
Many years ago, I had an opportunity to do work on an American Indian Reservation in Nevada, mostly related to setting up a photo lab in conjunction with their tribal history training. It was a small location, perhaps 90 members eking out a meager existence from withered crops, scrawny cattle, and minimum water resources. I shared their community/family embrace for three days. It changed my life.

Several 'anomalies' immediately came to the fore; differences between their attitude toward life, strangers, and spirituality from what I had known before. There were no fences—anywhere. Their language had no pronoun "I," except in secret spiritual rites. Children were raised by the entire community and were identified by 'pet names' taken from nature. I was called 'Wa Nee Po-to'—"one who lives in a horse," since I came in a small motor home. I camped next to an incredibly beautiful 'Morning Glory' natural hot-spring pool. There I could enjoy a late night dip and watch the sun rise through fragrant mists and chirps of hidden birds. Ah, yes! I also watched as family groups came down to the pool in the evening, reserved at first, but not wary. I was amazed how the children acted—absolute obedience! A year-old child could be left near the bank clutching a root—completely safe because it would never leave until told. The baby could swim; I was to learn—underwater and on its back—like a fish. I ate and read in silence—except to whistle as always. They watched, as did I.

On the second day, an old man came—no title or special dress. He feigned interest in my horse and talked of the lack of rain that spring. I had been raised right—to know that respectful action is more important than words. I hunkered down and picked up a fistful of dirt—smelled it—breathed deeply—poured it onto the ground, and brushed it smooth with a twig. He told me about the fences—how tribal members believed that fences create temporary enclosures in order to protect things within—new crops, cattle, and possibly ill persons. However, nothing was ever fenced out! It was not their land, after all, nor did they own the animals or plants; they simply shared an existence and spiritual 'brightness.' 'City-folk' often came to picnic there and left trash—they did not complain. A puma might steal a cow—they never hunted it. A lightning storm might fire the slope—they danced in the rain. And in everything, the family stood together, even in speech, as 'we' was their only form of speech.

After explaining all this to me, the shaman picked up a pebble from near the pool and placed it on the cleared spot by my feet. Then he took another from his pouch and placed it beside the first. When I looked up, he was gone!

But the children came. I taught them games from my youth, told them stories, and learned a new form of 'tag.' On the last day I was there, every able-bodied person in the tribe went on a round up. I could not ride well because I had a broken back, and so I was gifted to watch the children and the water gates. Moveable wooden platforms needed to be shifted in order to divert the meager stream into irrigation channels. I was given no instruction—just followed my instincts—knowing that I (we?) could make no mistake. I taught the children how to make 'heart baskets,' fragile grass nets that one would place over their heart and then give to another. When it later dried, it would be thrown into an evening fire. This a legacy from my minimal Algonquin ancestry. I took away much more from this 'family.'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They asked and learned nothing of my religion, politics, or attitudes about the 'outside' world. This was more than 30 years ago. I could go back today and give them my departing ritual name, 'No Clee Washa.' A story would be told and I would be accepted—even if no one of my friends is still alive—such is the value of verbal tribal history! They build no fences, but base all of their judgments of another on observed actions and kindness. They exclude no one from their lives and fellowship. A friend is not forever (no word for that either) there is only 'we.' I heard a lot of laughter—never saw a tear.

A month later, I built a fire and sent 20 'basket prayers' into the night air. The only chant I knew to cry out was to repeat my tribal name, 'Singing Grass Child.'

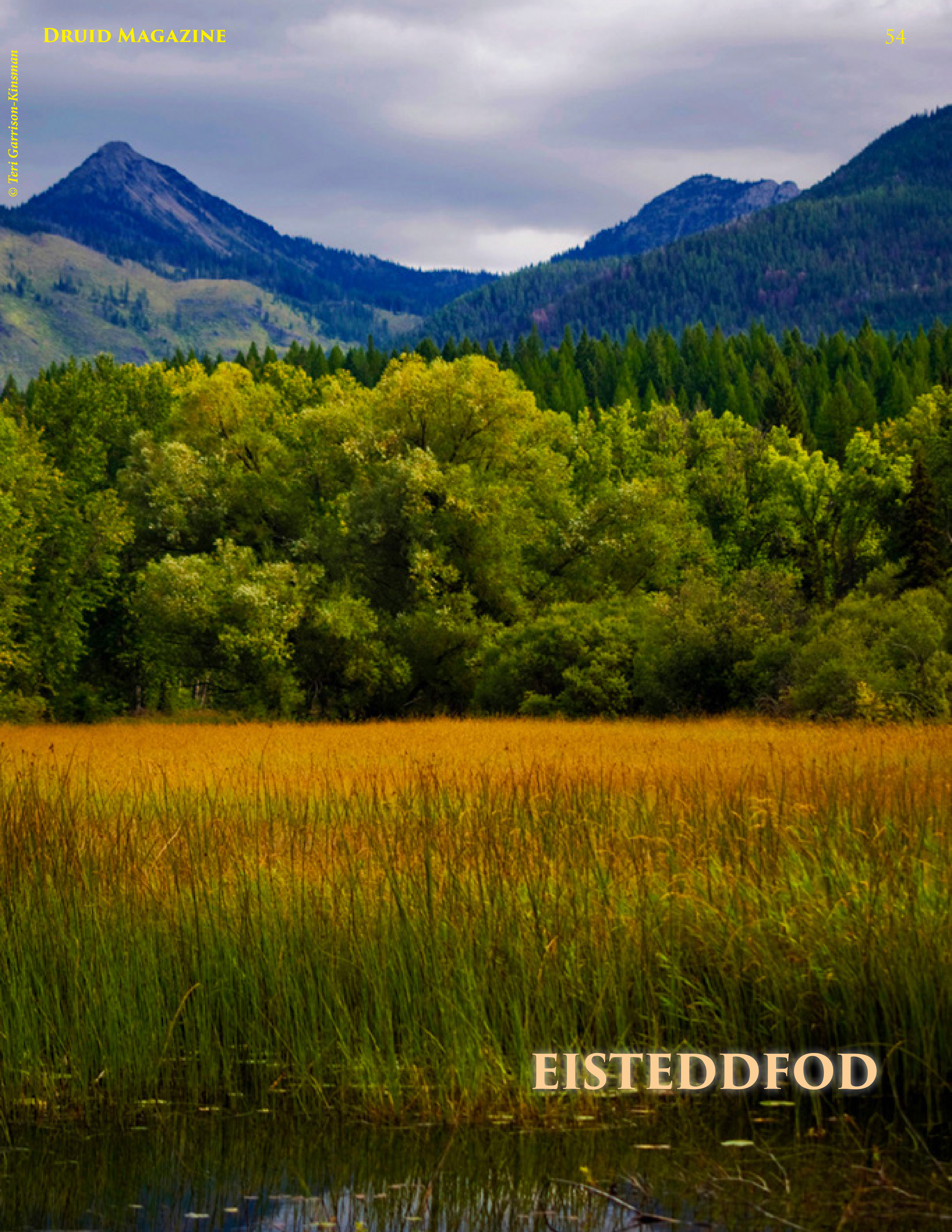
no clee washa, no ha—

no clee washa ha

FOR MORE INFORMATION

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duckwater_Shoshone_Tribe_of_the_Duckwater_Reservation

Ken Muller, also known as the faucon of Sakin'el, is protector of a primordial area known as Shernai with woods, stream, trails, deer, turkey, fox, and more. Limited guests share the glyn for spiritual inspiration, writing, song, and celebration in connection with North Carolina's Grove of the White Oak, which is affiliated with the New Order of Druids.



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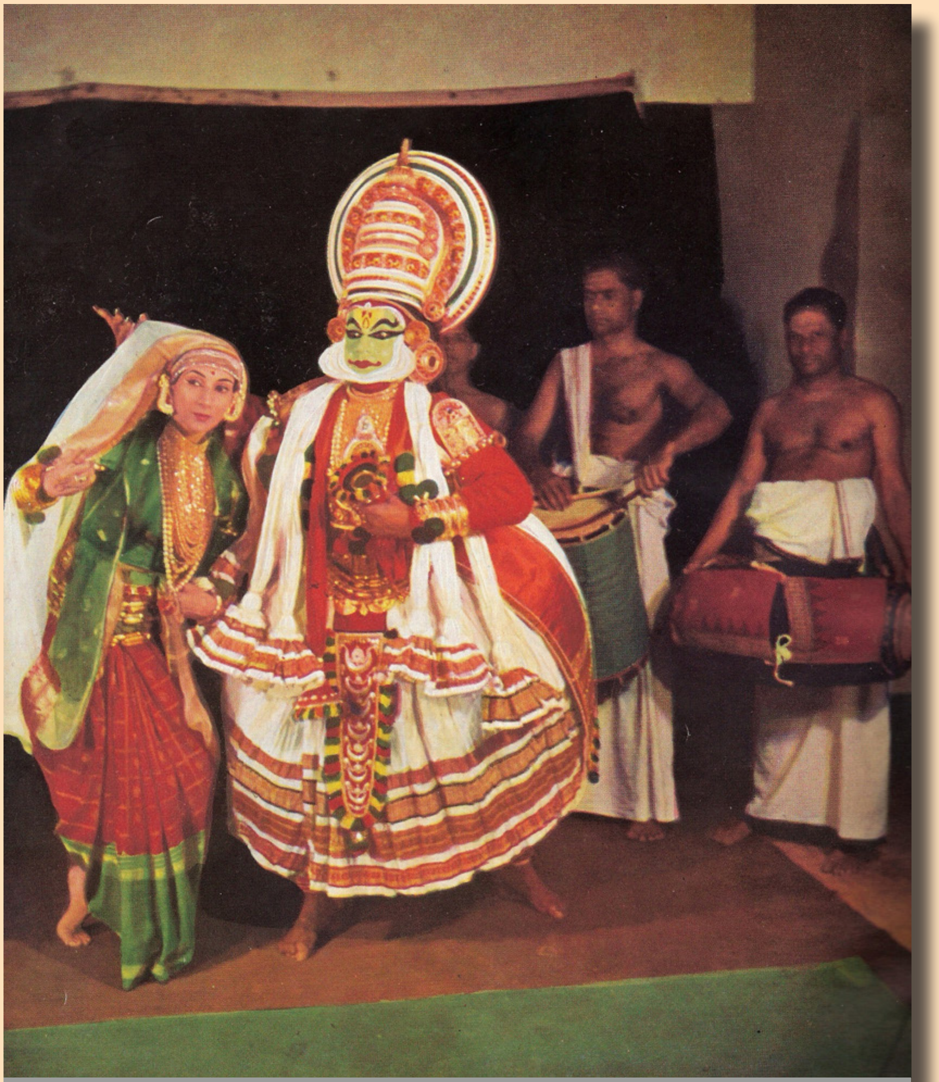
EISTEDDFOD

KATHAKALI: STORY IN DANCE

BY GAIL NYOKA

"In the broad, covered corridor – the colonnaded kuthambalum (temple theater) abutting the heart of the temple where the Blue God lived with his flute, the drummers drummed and the dancers danced, their colours turning slowly in the night" (Roy, 1997, p. 229).

In her 1997 Booker Prize-winning novel, *The God of Small Things,* writer Arundhati Roy describes a night-time scene where twin protagonists visit a temple where they spend hours watching a performance of tales from the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*. She depicts these Kathakali dancers as enacting the story only for themselves, as a way of making the stories whole. They danced the tales for the sake of having them told as they should be told, whether or not they had an audience.



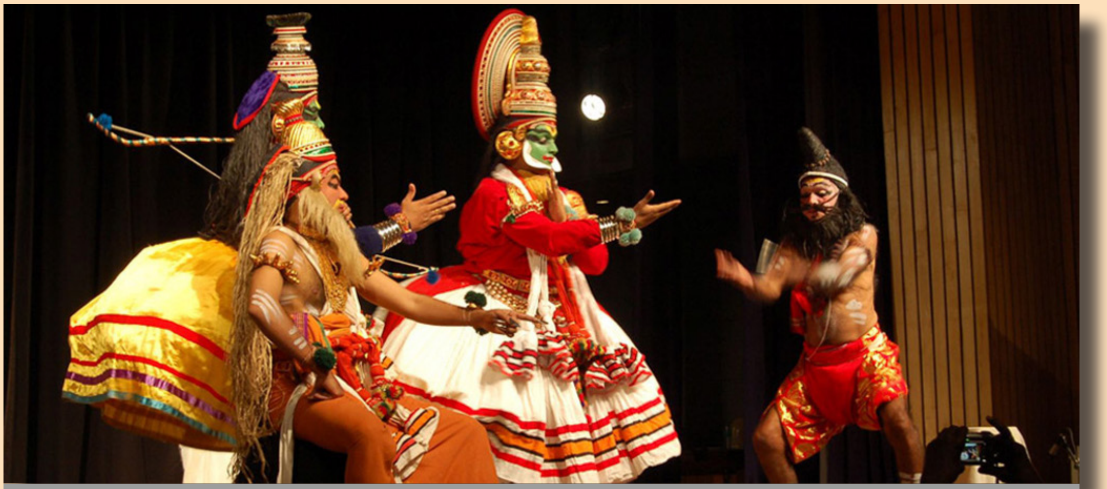
©Kathakali Centre

Dancers at the Kerala Kathakali Centre

I asked Toronto storyteller Rubena Sinha for more information on this ancient form of storytelling, done entirely through movement and music:

"Kathakali started with the *Ramayana*," explains Sinha, "because it was important for people to understand the story of the deities. It takes over five days to finish the story because it is so long. As soon as one episode is finished, there will be a song, telling the story."

Traditionally, Kathakali was performed only by men. "The men wear



©Kathakali Centre

Kathakali dancers by Hemender A. Shah, courtesy of Mrinalini Sarabhai

women's clothing. Sometimes you can't tell it's a man. They had to portray the beauty of the goddesses." Says Sinha. She explains that in order to appear more feminine in their movements, it was common for men's hips to be broken. "Now it's completely different from when I was growing up. There are women who learn Kathakali."

Kathakali is known for its elaborate costume, headdresses, and make-up. "The costume and expression makes them look bigger than life," Sinha says, speaking of the performers. "It is important to separate the dancers from the ordinary world. The dancers become the gods and goddesses."

According to Sinha, this is true for the numerous dance traditions in the country. "India has many types of classical dance," says Sinha. "Kathakali is just one of them. But, it is the only dance drama. Every classical dance has its own hand gestures and expression. They have meaning."

In the book, "Indian Dances: their history and growth" (1967), the authors state: "The dancer-actor employs the vivid language of gesture and mime… [and] Kathakali make-up is a complex art" (Singha & Massey, p. 92).

The dancer must learn to master the movements of the hand and fingers, as well as the precise expressions with their eyes, eyebrows, mouth, and facial muscles that convey the meaning within the dance. "You have to learn how to really separate your facial muscles," says Sinha. "It's very hard. Sometimes one cheek will be working, and the other, not."

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy (1997) touches upon two stories: that of Karma, the abandoned child who, as an adult, fights his brother to the death; and the story of the death of Duryodhana and his brother Dushasana in a tale of revenge.

In these stories, the heart of humans is depicted through the actions of gods. In describing the great stories of India, Roy could well be describing those of any culture:

> The great stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again. The ones you can enter anywhere and inhabit comfortably. They don't deceive you with thrills and trick endings. They don't surprise you with the unforeseen. They are as familiar as the house you live in. Or the smell of your lover's skin. You know how they end, yet you listen as though you don't. In the way that although you know that one day you will die, you live as though you won't. In the Great Stories you know who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn't. And yet you want to know again. (1997, p. 229)

References

Roy, A. (1997). *The God of small things.* London: Flamingo.

Singha, R., & Massey, R. (1967). *Indian dances: their history and growth.* New York, NY: George Brazeller.

Storyteller, author, and award-winning playwright, Gail Nyoka has been experiencing Awen with the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids since 2001. She is a celebrant and officiant in Ontario and Ohio.

© Teri Garrison-Kinsman

ACROSS THE HILL

BY FAUCON OF SAKIN'EL

The fire is lit –
the world is changing,
and we are swept up by the pace of the sun.
Yet we should now seed, nurture, and harvest
the essence of simple living
cherished in everbe.

I am a tiller of untamed earth,
removing the stones of self-deceit,
cultivating mind and heart and spirit,
to prepare my soul for wisdom seeds.

I will lay out my field in spiral rows,
growing larger by claim on what came before;
with one eye on the gifts of Gaia,
one eye on the Mountain's call,
and one on the brother by my side.

I am the farmer of presence and now,
bound by no fence and wary of fear;
to husband the Mother by thinning and cull,
to nurture the sprouts of yearning
with a grafting of value and wit.

The flowers and fruit are yours, my friend,
while I claim the bulbs of cherish;
for I am the land and plow and the rain
and will harvest the sweep of the sun.

© faucon of Sakin'el

See faucon of Sakin'el's other article and bio in this issue by clicking here

BELTANE'S WISH

BY WANDA C

How I wish I stood there in the mist upon the morrow's night
Felt the wild wicked wind surround me and bring such delight
In all the magickal wonder of this glorious sabbat of fire
Embrace all that is me and ignite it with my true one desire
I want to smell the sea salt air as it whispers and rushes along
Sing out of gentle tenderness from a meadow's quiet lingering song
Stand tall midst the bastion stones that call to my aching soul
Beckoning to be lost in the frenzied dance to make me whole
My spirit will fly o'er the rivers and oceans so great and wide
To stir the flames and join as one where the deities' union betide
I am here, great Goddess and God of Light, with arms open and upheld
To give all with my loving heart and rejoice as all our bodies meld
May the fruition of your love and passion's dream of night come true
As I dedicate myself upon this eve and give loving worship unto You.

Postscript...

Blessed Be this Magickal Night upon the turn of twilight
Fade away the hurt and pain and bring forth the truth in light
Find me here, your learned student as I take my steps forward
Ever closer to your love to enshroud my aura that burns so bright.

Wanda C., also known as Wanda Ghostpeeker, is a Druid grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids. She is a world traveler who draws inspiration from sacred sites she visits for some of her poetry.

PAT REED'S SHORT STORY

BY LEON REED

Born in St. Helens, you would be

The eldest daughter in your family tree.

Many a day since old Dobbin was your steed

When big trouble was the kraut-cutter
making you bleed

Many a day passed before you
became Mrs. Reed.

You picked Jim as he got off a crummy
in his fatigue,

In Lamm's Camp He had been out logging trees.

Years later when you married into the Reeds,

Everyone was tipsy, feeling no misery.

You would have been together but
the war intervened,

He served many years on the Tennessee,

Somehow Jim survived it and so got free,

And on his return you started a family.

Many things were tried and some succeed.

Prineville, and camps, and K I D

At Horseshoe dam, where we made
our homestead teepee.

With, gardens, canning, animals,
and two hungry boys to feed.

It was in the year of 1960

We moved to Reno to try to succeed.

In Sparks one Xmas we all agreed

Better a dishwasher than a TV.

You took on a restaurant, trying to help me,

A fish and chips place In Talent Oregon,
called Tillie's

© Jim Reed

Patricia Kitchin Reed, 3/27/26 - 1/31/16

Luckily your love was stronger than grief,

And you made your way back

to Klamath County.

Again Dad worked irrigating, and you got

the work you needed.

On Denver where talking territorial

Termite teed

Any old cat that strayed in the yard

instead of fleed.

Out on the crick with Jim Reed

Many fish were caught and many freed

At the hill house bob joined the coterie

It was good for a while till the

neighbors so aggrieved

That you moved into the court

where Helen wanted to be.

This was your last home in K falls county.

After Jim and Bob passed you came

to live near the Sea,

In our little house with Allen and Me.

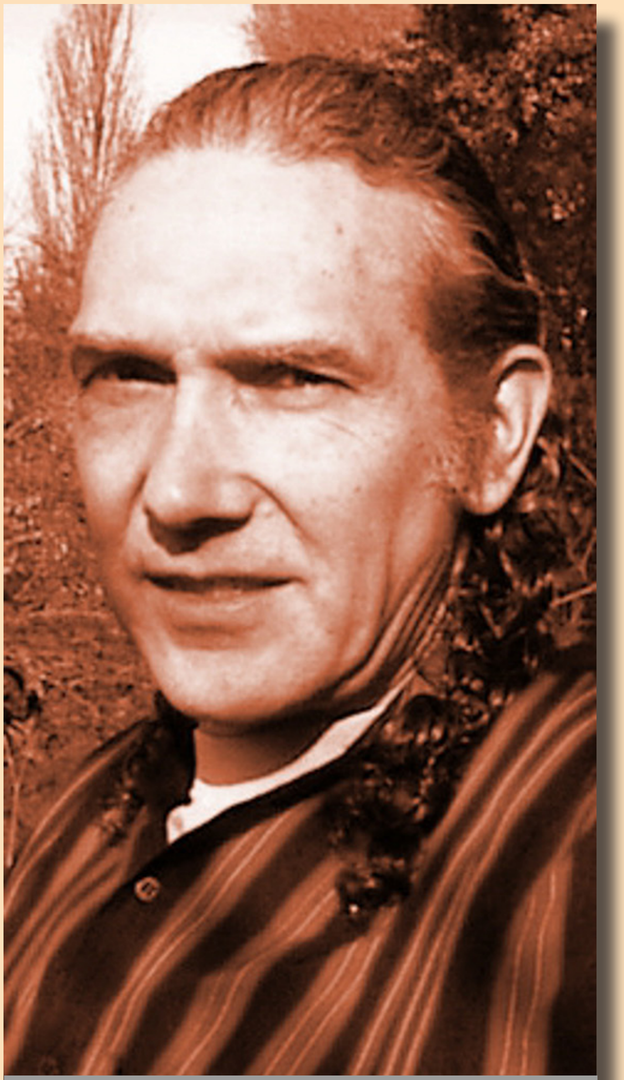
It has been a joy to see you revive daily

Growing stronger and more able to squeeze.

I hope this birthday proves to be very happy,

That you enjoy many more with us where ever

we be.



© Allen Kornmesser

Author Leon Reed

Please note: this was previously published on the British Druid Order's website at http://www.druidry.co.uk/bdo-members-area/public_forums/topic/patricia-reed/

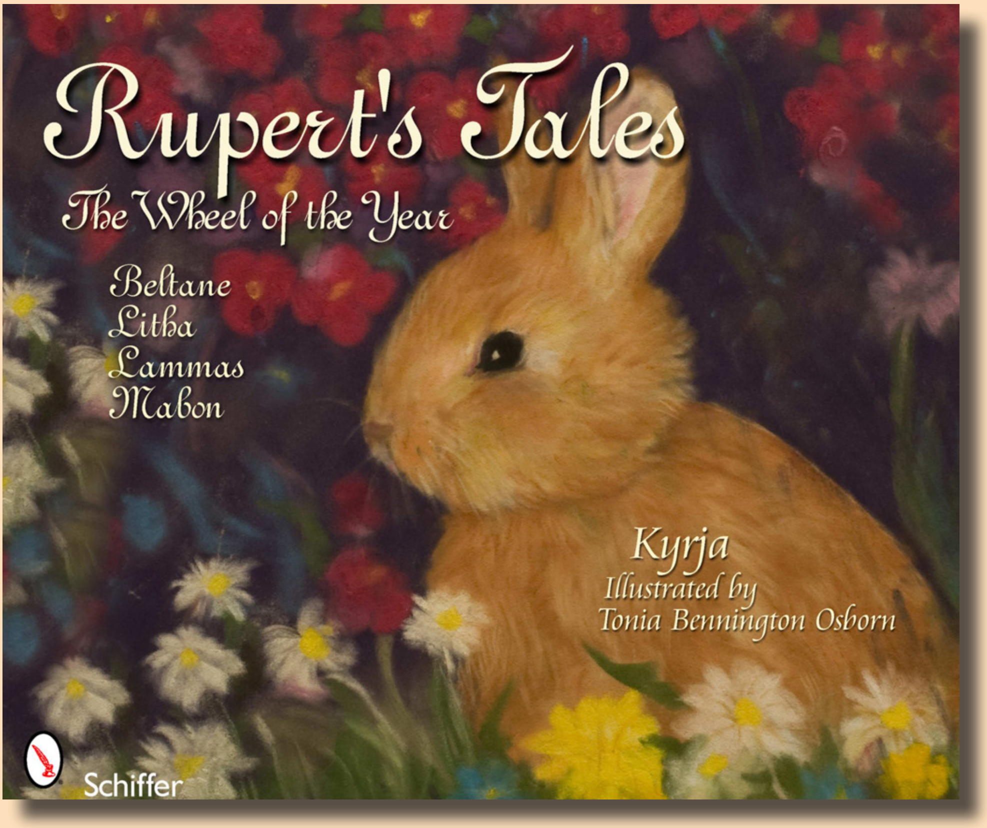
Leon is a fine artist who makes altars, jewelry, and assemblages. He is a Druid of the British Druid Order and an Ovate in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids. He is also a Kingstone Wiccan Elder, and he performs divination and rites of passage, as well as ghost hunting.

RUPERT'S TALES

BY SARAH DISLER

K., & Osborn, T. B. (2011). Rupert's tales: The wheel of the year: Beltane, Litha, Lammas, and Mabon. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing.

Hello Druids and Druid-curious! I hope you have little ones or know a few you can read to because this month's review is of a beautifully illustrated children's book. The author, Kyrja, is an active Pagan and looks at different seasons and holidays in *Rupert's Tales: The Wheel of the Year: Beltane, Litha, Lammas, and Mabon* (2011). In this charming book, various creatures talk to Rupert, a young bunny, about some strange human activities in his forest. We see the seasons and holidays, such as Beltane, through basically a child's (Rupert's) eyes.



© Schiffer Publishing

I thought this was a great way to explain Pagan holidays and even some Pagan/Druid beliefs to a child. Rupert explains what he sees, such as those darn humans trampling on his beautiful grass. One of his guides, a wise owl, explains that through dancing, praying, and other behavior, people are doing something they consider sacred. As the owl tells Rupert why Beltane is celebrated, he says: "Instincts and the weather, the seasons, moon and sun / These are the guideposts by which all our lives are lives and all things are done," (Kyrja, 2011, p. 13) . Rupert is satisfied with this explanation, as it shows humans care about and honor the same things he does.

I have a confession—I tested this book on my own children! It turns out, especially with the rhyming throughout the book, it really appeals to them. In my heart of hearts, I would like to

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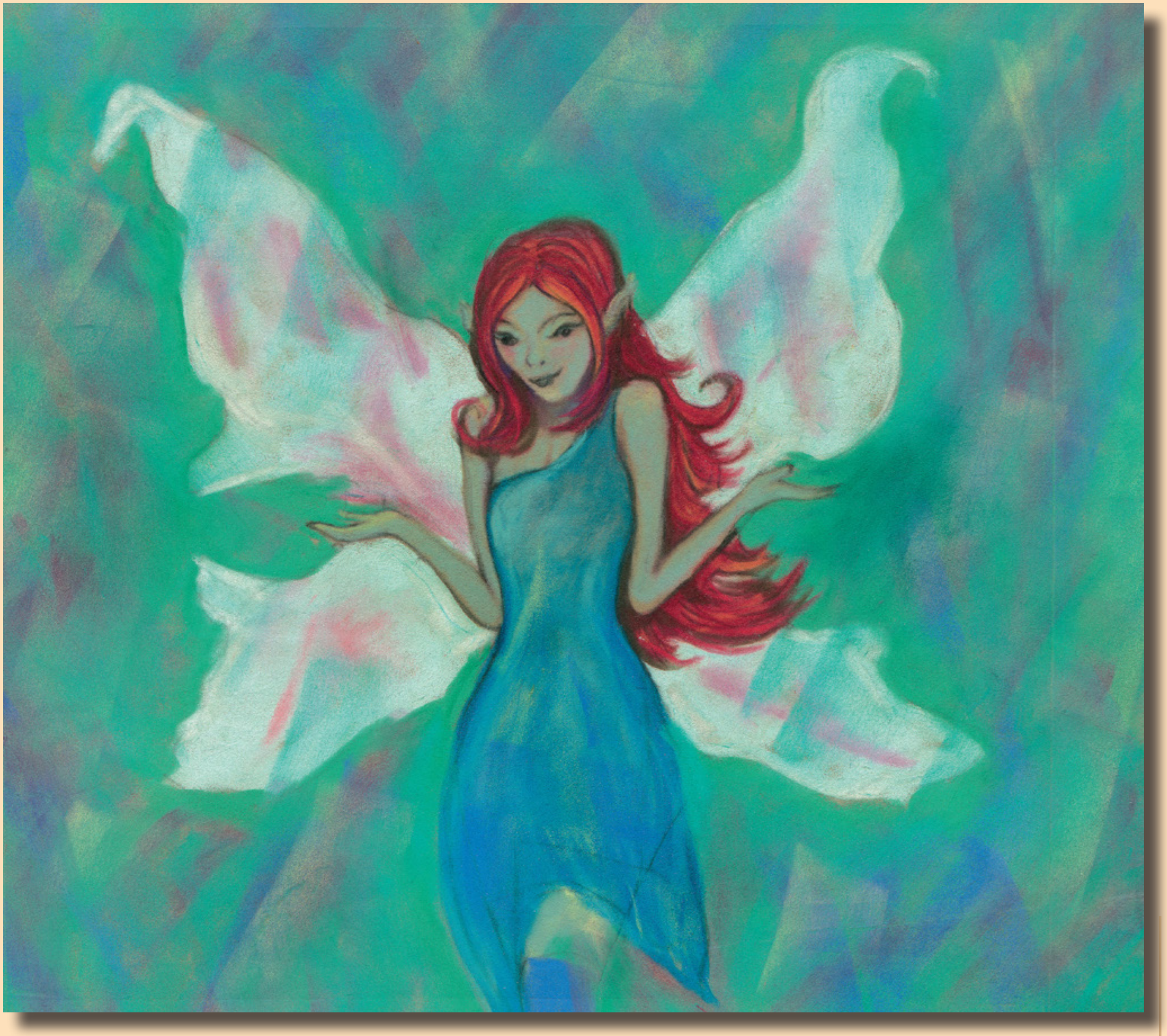


believe I would have read this book for the illustrations alone, even if I had no children. They are very elegant and beautifully drawn. Many of the lessons/ symbolism, although well-written, get a bit lost on small children. But I was happy to read this to my kids with its emphasis on balance and love throughout the book. They may choose a Pagan/ Druid path, or they may not. Either way, they enjoyed a cute bunny story!

Sarah Disler has been in the Bardic Grade in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids since early 2015. She has a stellar career looking at pictures all day, which required years and years of intense training (not really). Most of her energy goes into animal sound mimicry and chaos management. Some would also call it 'raising toddlers.'

© Teri Garrison-Kinsman

Around the Americas

GULF COAST GATHERING 2016

BY ART SCARBROUGH AND KATHLEEN HARRINGTON

The wooded ozone forests of the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain were home to Native Americans of the Choctaw tribal group long before the European invasion of North America. In the early years of the 19th Century, Bernard de Marigny de Mandeville established a large holding in the area, which soon became a booming sugar plantation. This land has been blessed by Native Americans, French gentlemen, African slaves, Confederate and Union soldiers, and most recently this sacred landscape has become the home to the OBOD Gulf Coast Gathering (GCG)!

GCG takes place around each Alban Eilir at Fontainebleau State Park in Louisiana.

© John Beckett

Founded in 2015 as a service to OBOD by Highland Oak Nemeton, the GCG is one of a few major OBOD gatherings in North America. Held on a weekend near Alban Eilir, the Spring Equinox, GCG sits in counterpoint with the more well-established East Coast Gathering, which is held at Alban Elfed, the Autumn Equinox.

The camp is set aside in a private part of Fontainebleau State Park. While a full weekend of workshops, ritual celebration, and learning is always featured, there is ample time for exploring the surrounding area or even a little alligator watching. The camp itself has dormitory-style sleeping arrangements and a fully equipped kitchen/ dining hall. All buildings have heating and air conditioning plus the standard array of toilets and showers. Each cabin has a public area ideal for breakout sessions and inclement weather gatherings.

Many attendees plan on a few days before or after GCG to explore the most magical city in North America—New Orleans. Located a mere 40 minutes from camp, New Orleans, “the Paris of the New World," is unlike any other city.

From its inception, GCG has focused on facilitating a meaningful spiritual and learning experience for everyone. Breakout sessions for each grade give individuals an opportunity to compare notes with others. At the same time, several experienced Druid Grade members are on hand to help answer questions, and we hold at least one panel discussion on a key topic of interest. Time alone on the pier of the quiet inland pond near the camp can itself be a spiritual experience and, if you should happen to have the chance to chat with one of the local alligators or even a possum or two, so much the better.

GCG 2016 was held on March 17–20. The theme was "Celebrating the Bardic Arts," and featured Gail Nyoka, OBOD Druid and noted storyteller, author, and playwright, as the keynote speaker. Gail entertained the group on Friday night with her interactive talk, "Diving into Story," in which she told an Irish tale and explored it in depth with the workshop participants. Gail's incredible talent in bringing an audience into a story had everyone enthralled with her tales.

© John Beckett

Gale Park giving her workshop on 'Accessing the Awen.'

© Dana Wyninger

Clint Chamberlain (left) and Ron Cameron (right) discussing 'Weaving Realtionships and Beauty Using the Mateiral World"

Other workshops were "Bardic Magic," by John Beckett; "Accessing the Awen," by Gale Park; "Dance!" by Wendy Bourg and Kate Laborde; "The Art of Crystal Jewelry," by Gabrielle Batz Roberts; "Weaving Relationships and Beauty Using the Material World," by Clint Chamberlain and Ron Cameron; "Singing the Heart Song," by Jennifer Jacoby; and "Drawing Your Own Mandala," by Krista Carter-Smith. Mark Fowler presented an interactive workshop on mead preparation, starting a batch on Thursday evening and updating its progress with the participants at intervals over the weekend.

On Saturday evening, Art Scarbrough facilitated a panel discussion on "Creative Rituals," featuring Lorraine Soria, John Beckett, Cynthia Talbot, and Gail Nyoka. Also on the weekend schedule were visits to the 1,500-year-old Seven Sisters Oak, the largest southern live oak in the country, and a nature walk at the nearby Northlake Nature Center, led by Master Naturalist Honora Buras.

© John Beckett

The camp's resident alligator

The Alban Eilir ritual was held on Friday evening, closely followed by a brief but enthusiastic thunderstorm that ushered in a cool front. Temperatures dropped on Saturday evening to an unseasonal low, giving the nine Bards and one Ovate who were awaiting initiation a bit more of a character-building experience than they might have anticipated! Everyone survived, however, and the group repaired to the dining hall to refill their mead cups and warm up.

Food at GCG is a bit of a departure from what one might expect at a camp—Pat and Sue Yglesias, friends of Highland Oak Nemeton and Cajun chefs *par excellence*, volunteered their time to cook memorable meals featuring many Louisiana favorites, including sauce piquante, gumbo, and jambalaya. No one went hungry that weekend!

No one went thirsty, either: Mark Fowler and Richard Abbott provided mead on tap for the gathering, which was appreciated greatly by the mead enthusiasts in the group. Ample amounts of that southern staple, sweet iced tea, were available, as was coffee, other teas, and lemonade.

© Dana Wiyninger

John Beckett presenting on 'Bardic Magic'

In March of 2017, Gulf Coast Gathering will once again visit the sacred land on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain and facilitate a rousing good time for OBOD members and their families and friends from around the nation and around the world.

Please visit our website, http://gulfcoastgathering.druidry.org, for details of the upcoming gathering as they develop!

© Dana Wiyninger

Items for sale at GCG range from jewelry to Tibetan singing bowls

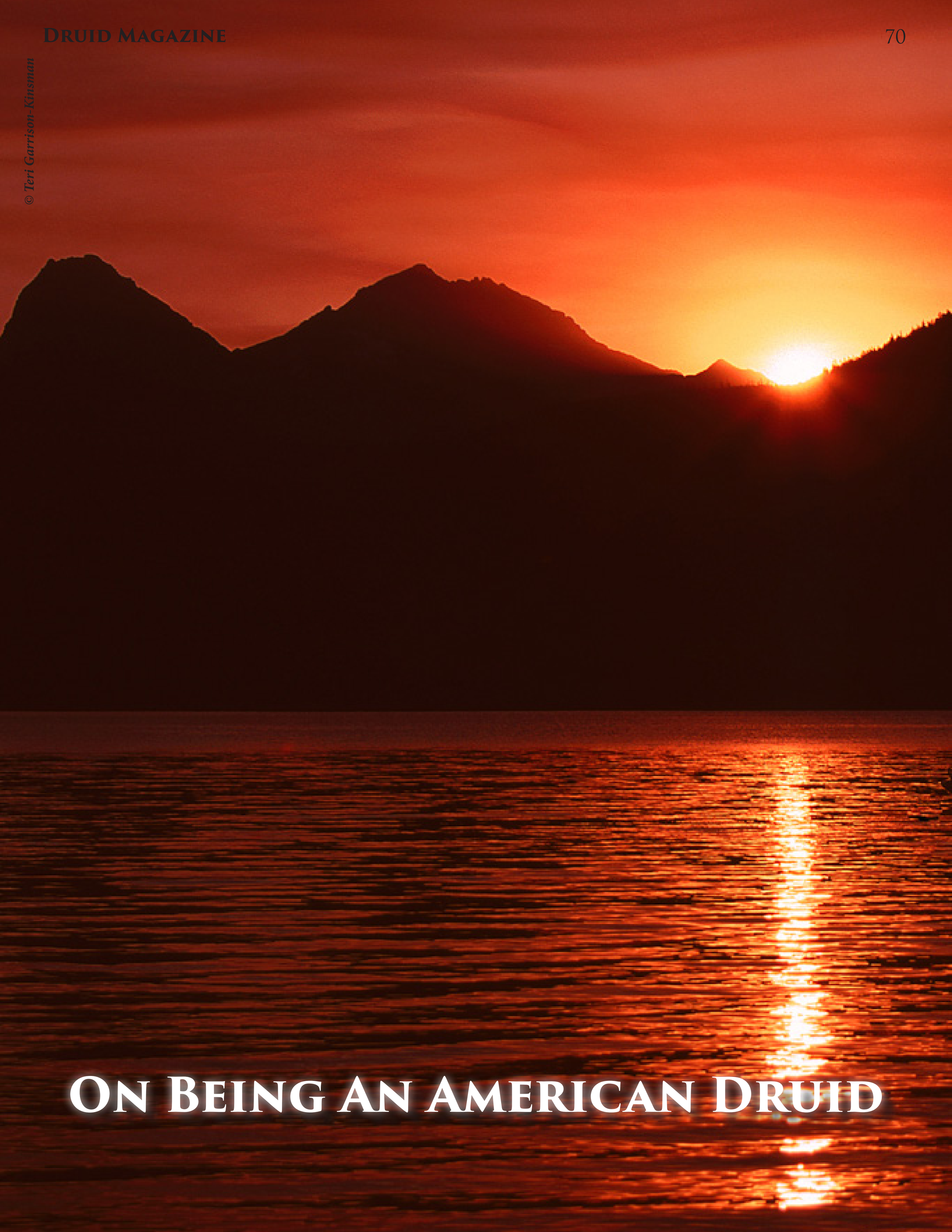
© John Beckett

Kathleen Harrington is a Druid Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids from Baton Rouge, LA. Retired from Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine, she divides her time between working with three local non-profit organizations, Highland Oak Nemeton, the Baton Rouge Unit of the Herb Society of North America, and the Louisiana Master Naturalists of Greater Baton Rouge, and catering to the whims of her seven cats.

Art Scarbrough is a Druid Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids and has been a member since the late 1990s. Over the years, he has served various leadership and coordination roles for the OBOD message board and the East Coast Gathering OBOD camp. He is also the founding member of the Highland Oak Nemeton Grove in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

UPCOMING IN THE WINTER 2017 ISSUE...

DRUIDRY & MENTAL HEALTH



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On Being An American Druid

A DRUID IN AMERICA

BY NADIA THANASOULAS CHAUVET

In true American fashion, I immigrated here like so many others before me. I was born in France to a Greek father so the questions regularly arising in my life include: Am I more American than French now that I have U.S. citizenship and have chosen this country? What about my Greek ancestry? Where should my allegiance be?

In truth, I have learned a lot from each country, developing as a woman and as a Druid. The borders might be blurrier than some think.

The English garden at the "Island," Bel-Air de Combree in the West of France

© Nadia Chauvet

Sure, my accent is French, and I was born on French soil, making me French in regards to French law. I was also born from a Greek father, making me a Greek citizen in the eyes of Greek law. After Europe opened its borders, it didn't really matter anymore. I was a European.

Then I moved to the United States and chose to apply for citizenship, making me a full-fledged American in the eyes of the U.S. Government.

But deeply within, I feel like I am all three. Why should I choose? History and my upbringing has helped me see the unity between these three countries; Druidry cemented this union.

France

Let us start with France, since I grew up there. As a child, my classmates asked me if I felt more Greek or French. I found it a difficult question then. It was almost as if they were asking me, "Do you prefer your French mother to your Greek father?" Whom would I choose? There is, of course, no answer to that question. I can no more favor one parent over the other than I can choose which of my roots are more relevant.

The real answer is that I felt at home wherever I went with my parents. That alone helped considerably lower the importance of borders as we crossed them quite regularly throughout my childhood to the point that going into Germany, Greece, Belgium, and Italy were just an afterthought. The true borders were with the other people at school, in the street, and in the village.

In a way, there were more borders for me within France than there were within Europe, and that was before the Schengen Agreement (*see sidebar below*).

One real border I encountered pretty early on in life was when my family and I left from Paris to settle in the countryside in the Loire Valley, at the doors of French Brittany. To the entire village, we were the "foreigners." We didn't have any roots there or family or any right to buy a property on their land. In small villages, people refer to their community (the village plus the surrounding countryside) as "le pays," the country, so that every little village in France is a small country all unto itself. One village can be at war with the village "next door." Hence, jealousies and daily pettiness, in addition to local history, contributed to tiny local boundaries.

The Schengen Area comprises 26 European countries in Western Europe that have abolished passports and any other type of control at their mutual borders. It mostly functions as a single country for international travel purposes with a common visa policy. They have strengthened border controls with non-Schengen states.

The village where we settled was an old miner's town where all the houses looked similar. The people didn't get along at all with those in the next village, which was older and mostly composed of farmers. Villagers were condescending to each other—and let's not talk about the closest village on Brittany soil that was 20 kilometers away and didn't want anything to do with "tourists" from other towns. They would sell them the wrong produce, provide lesser quality merchandise, or give the wrong directions. The least you could get was a prolonged stare. Brittany was the last region in France to be annexed to the French Kingdom through the wedding of Anne de Bretagne to the French King in 1491. Before then, Brittany was an independent duchy with its own language and laws, and they hold onto that to this day. There is an independent political wing still at work in the region.

Yet, these differences don't hold against some other aspects of more recent history. The French Revolution shaped these areas. We moved into the historical region of the "Chouans," and you can't mix a Chouan with a Vendeen (from the region Vendee) even though the whole uprising against the French Revolution, which happened in the West of France, was called generically "the Vendean Wars" (1793–1796). A Chouan was a farmer from a specific part of the west who could imitate the cry of the "Chat-Huant," a nightly bird like an owl, hence the name. He would lead a guerilla-type war for short spurs with a group of villagers, then go back to tend his land. The Chouans were located in the northwest of the Loire Valley (where we were) and in Brittany.

Historically, there is a strong bond between the village 20 kilometers away in Brittany and our miners' and farmers' towns. Beyond that, in the southwest, were the Vendeans who were a bit more militarized and led by true military leaders from local nobility. If you talk about "chouanerie," the villager's grudges will fall instantly away. An interesting bit of information we learned after a few years living there was that the Chouans used ancient underground passages to escape from the Republican army. These passages had been carved out or dug during Druidic times for ritual purposes. Thus, the invisible inner borders were constantly shifting, depending on the dates of 1491, 1793, or today. Parisians were despised not only geographically, but also historically; the French Revolution is still a very divisive subject, and people in Western France are very touchy about this part of their past, which is not taught at school.

However, I found unity and acceptance despite the opinionated people around me—in nature. We had bought a house with a huge garden divided into three parts. There was the section around the main house, which had mature English-type bushes, old trees, and small alleys hiding behind rhododendrons. Then there were the outbuildings that used to host horses, a car, and a henhouse, as well as a vegetable garden. At the edge of the forest, we had a few acres of ground probably used by the horses to graze and exercise when the property was at its height. To this day, I still dream about this place. We called it the Island. A place of harmony it was, enclosed by old walls and fences—our own borders against the curious stare of

© Nadia Chauvet

The author, who used to climb the tree behind on the left. Her first dog, Willy, is buried at the feet of the leafless tree on the right. You can see one of the smallest outbuildings in the background and the forest behind.

the neighbors. For example, each time we went to the village, we could see the curtains of the house across the street rise and someone peer at us. The walls and the trees were protecting us, giving us privacy.

I was lucky. I had a tight-knit family. We lived in an intellectually self-sufficient way without getting bored. My parents loved gardening, reading, listening to music, and discussing politics, history, philosophy, and religion. Most of all, they loved laughing. They still do! This list of activities does not have borders. You can listen to Mozart or Beethoven anywhere, in your head, on CD, in the car, in Greece, or in France. Nature also grows everywhere, and, wherever you look, you can be sure to find solace in its beauty, with all of its different shapes and perfumes: mountains, plains, deserts, seas. Looking at a bud blooming is the same activity in Greece as it is in France. And if you can laugh at yourself as much as at others, without meanness, then you can let go of all borders truly. Learning to accept others was, however, the most difficult task of all. I wasn't quite there yet.

This Island is where I learned to make friends with nature. I was climbing trees more often than anything else and I would meditate on that same branch for hours. I started to pretend to become a tree with roots and bark and leaves; or I would become the grass and look at the sky as the grass would see it. I talked to the vegetal world. I loved the mystery and silence of forests, hiding a teeming life behind green leaves. I also meditated in a secret grove of my own, daydreaming in a forest clearing near a stone and a sacred well. I would go into the nearby woods alone for a whole afternoon. I visited the Broceliande Forest quite often. I was working on my future *Gwersi* unknowingly. I even think I had my first and only "out-of-body experience" there.

I moved back to Paris for my studies after I graduated high school, shortly after the picture above was taken. This is when I realized that the real border between human beings is judgement and how we view each other. When I had moved to Greece years later for my Master's degree, I didn't speak Greek fluently. I knew the vocabulary and I could understand the language, but I was definitely not at ease. Yet, that move was less frightening to me (actually it was not frightening at all) than moving back to Paris when I finished high school. Unsurprisingly, it bothered me more to be considered a "peasant" by snotty Parisians than to be welcomed in Greece by a population eager to see its children try to speak Greek, however badly.

My friends back in the village thought I would become a snob, and my Parisian friends thought we were better off in the "City of Lights" than back in the mud. Again, people in Paris judged each other on whether they lived in the 1st or the 14th arrondissement (the equivalent in New York, for example, would be the difference between living on 5th Avenue or in the Bronx). During the years I spent in Paris, I was cut off from nature, too, and missed it tremendously.

The parks in Paris are in the French style, which means the gardens look and feel like an extension of architecture. The few "English" parks around have more people than trees in them. I wanted a forest. I needed the silence—I had been spoiled by my Island. When you have a park that looks like a forest near Paris, it is dangerous and full of either drug addicts or sex offenders.

I was glad to have chosen to study the history of art at the School of the Louvre. I found myself immersed in history, art, philosophy, and religions from around the world and throughout centuries. Of course, lessons were at the Louvre in front of the greatest art ever created by humanity, and where all the tourists would gather from around the world. In addition, I joined a chorus. We sang Verdi and Mozart once a week, and it was glorious. So I found unity in Paris through art and music, and I looked at my studies with an eagle's eye, disregarding borders. Like Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* (2008), I drew comparisons beyond time or culture to compare myths and religions. I was already a Bard in my heart, stringing stories together.

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The author's house in Greece with a view on the island Euboea. The land is green now thanks to the well her mother discovered.

Greece

I spent two years working on my Master's Degree in Greece, the country of Gods and philosophers. I plunged into my Greek roots "for real." I started meditating again and communicating with nature. It also seemed easier to leave the borders of Athens than of Paris. I went to the beach and the surrounding mountains, and I got lost in ruins. Nature grows luxuriously in Greece, provided that it doesn't burn during the hot summer months (104° F with hot winds can be deadly). Greeks smoke a lot, and often throw their cigarette butts out through the car window while driving, setting fires to the dry weeds and grasses as well as the mostly pine trees.

While spending the summer in Greece, my parents and I fought side by side with firefighters to stop the spreading of wildfires instead of going to the beach as planned. A lot of Greeks will stop their cars—and the traffic—if they see a fire starting by the side of the road, trying to put it out with water, stomping, and blankets. But this act of solidarity and courage won't hinder them from throwing their own cigarette butts later on, although awareness of this problem is rising. Nowadays, if people throw cigarettes out the window, they will most likely be honked at from others cars and copiously called names. It isn't nearly enough though. There are wild weeds everywhere, even in the most cemented areas of town: wild red poppies breaking through the asphalt, gnarled roots of olive trees raising cement blocks at every corner. Even the center of Athens is green in winter and spring. Plus, you never lose sight of the mountains or the sea.

During this stay in Greece was the first time I felt the purity of the air in the Greek countryside. You can be lazy and take a nap, but if you successfully fight the urge to sleep at noon, you find a quality of silence in the middle of the day that is quite startling. It somehow sharpens your mind. Here is where I learned to put into words and analyze what I had been feeling about borders and nature—and nature's incredible strength.

When I missed being in Greece after I returned to France, I had a very vivid dream smelling the air of Greece, and I woke up when all the fragrances reached my nose. It was also in Greece that I started vividly dreaming. I grew an interest in plants and their uses. I fell back in touch with myself again after the Parisian gap. I was again the little girl who could talk to trees and pretend to become grass. Mostly, I communed with the sea and became a wave. Here is where I truly became an Ovate at heart.

I also noticed for the first time that the old religions hadn't died despite the lead weight of the Orthodox Church. I had seen Druids in Broceliande in France, but, as a 13-year-old, I had thought it funny at the time. I thought it funny, mainly, that grown-ups would dress up as Druids. Catholic priests dressed up a bit during mass in churches, but they were in all black. I saw that as mostly boring and dreary, but also normal. The French are quick to make fun of everyone and everything, and religion is mostly kept to oneself and discreet—I am talking mostly about Catholicism, which is restricted to churches. Muslims pray in the streets, even more so today than when I lived there, but that is another topic. In that sense, Druidism detracts from the trend with ceremonies held in forests and near standing stones. I remember seeing a Bard in Broceliande once. He was dressed in white garb, and he was telling stories of chivalry in a deep booming voice. I started laughing until the words sunk in and, in a few minutes, I was hooked and fascinated. I liked it, but didn't think much more about it then. The memory stayed with me though.

The other memory I have about Paganism in France was the day we visited the standing stones of Carnac. We weren't wanted. We were called "tourists" as if it were an insult. Then we heard that the inhabitants didn't want visitors because they were dirtying the sites and touching everything—and also because they were depleting the sites of energy. That last part we didn't understand at all. To us though, this was less a display of Paganism, and more like a parade of regional chauvinism at the time. How wrong we were…That shows also that even within Druids, we raise our own borders against "others."

In Greece, every ruin I visited had offerings, small, humble, and discreet gifts such as flowers, olive branches, little objects, coins, and ribbons left on a column, at the feet of a broken sculpture, or near a water hole. Even today, the Greek Church very actively—proactively I should say—tries to mislead tourists from the signs pointing to some sites. They still say that we will burn at the stake as a witch if we go back to the old superstitions. They insult Pagans using the same words they use to insult members of the LGBTQ community and the Turks. So that is saying something.

Most of Greek Paganism has been

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Cesar, the author's second dog in Greece, who was poisoned.

very quiet and underground up until a few years ago, when the dodekatheists suddenly sprouted in 2007 to lobby with all their might to open ancient temples back up to worship. But Greeks never truly left their old religion. It is my belief that every Greek is an undercover Pagan! For example, there is a garden at the center of Athens marked by graffiti stating: *We do not come from dust and earth, but Zeus' semen*. While I was studying for my Master's degree, I learned dances to bring rain, fertility stones rites, and entrances to the underground world of Hades, all still well and alive in our century.

We had some difficulty visiting the site of Dion a few years ago because the church had removed the signs. Dion is a very important site at the foot of Mount Olympus, where the discoveries keep coming even today. They found a hydraulic organ dating from the 1st Century BC when it was previously thought that the earliest organ came from the Middle Ages (9th Century AD). The site was dedicated to Zeus; Dion is conjugated from Dias, which is the name the ancient Greeks called Zeus. It was, in turn, derived to mean *Dieu* in French, which means God. That means that *Dieu*, or God, in French Catholicism, is in fact Zeus, fun fact!

Rhamnous is another important site and was a port city in Attiki, north of Athens, at Marathonas, where the original Marathon was run by Philipides. It has one of the only temples to Thetis (justice) and Hybris (hubris) in Greece. It is open only to archaeologists, and only historians of art specializing in Classical Greece know about it. Some sites aren't even advertised, like Amphiarion, a sanctuary to a chthonic small deity and hero. It was an important place of healing in antiquity and has been recorded on many tablets and carvings. Now, it is all but forgotten.

The dodekatheists, as I mentioned, are trying to reopen temples for worship, but their efforts have been opposed by the Greek Church. As an historian of art as well as a Druid, I have to agree with them. The old temples weren't built to become museums. Why not assign them back their true purpose? Too many art museums, I can say after having visited a lot, do not have souls. Museums can become a mass grave of human creativity, with objects assembled out of context in one place, gathering dust, stared at by tourists who are without any intimate knowledge of their true nature. These works of art no longer vibrate or energize. If anything, a museum can deplete people of their energy; visiting them can be a very tiring experience.

There are so many tourists at the Louvre, especially crowded in front of famous paintings like the Mona Lisa, that the experience is limiting. Also, there are so many paintings that, after a while, visitors pass by them too tired to notice even the gems. The last time I was there, my brain turned off after spending the whole day looking at nativity scenes. The intimacy between the work of art and the person viewing it becomes lost in these museums. Without any windows, security guards, or crowds, the objects of art vibrate again—as historians experience when restoring, cleaning, or curating them. The building of the Louvre itself is worth a visit since it was a palace for the kings of France before becoming a museum. But that rather highlights my point: *The Venus de Milo* belonged in a Greek rural temple and was the highlight of that precise sacred space. Now it is in a crowded room in a king's palace in a different country. In Greece, we have the chance to have museums on actual sacred sites. Despite some sites having been depleted of their energy, a lot are still able to connect with us emotionally and energy-wise.

The weird thing is that the Greeks never asked me if I felt more French than Greek. To them, Greece is the cradle, the umbilicus of Europe, so it was a fact that I was Greek because that gene would be the strongest and the primary.

I was still not as accepting of others as I feel I should have been because of my experiences there. We had bought a piece of land in the outskirts of a village in the north of Athens, thinking it was dry and worthless. After my mother found water there using a dousing rod, we were accused of being thieves because land with water is much more valuable. My mother was already considered a foreigner and called a whore for wearing shorts, and now she was also considered a witch and a thief. The villagers also killed two of our dogs because we were foreigners. I still grieve my beautiful Baloo for his death was violent (he was beaten to death) and he was innocent. We replaced Baloo with Cesar, who was poisoned.

Back then, I thought that accepting others meant condoning this mean behavior and my dogs' deaths. OBOD taught me the importance of reaching out hopefully before such behavior happens. My family had been content to be different. Perhaps we had been a bit arrogant to expect people from a different background and upbringing to interact with us as if we were locals. This understanding, and the importance of teaching others about who you are, came to me when I lived in the United States.

The United States

The next stop in my life was New York and, although I was excited and understandably worried about another move into the unknown, I was not scared or sad to cross yet another border. It was an easy one to cross. My parents had met and fallen in love in New York. They had talked so much and so lovingly about their years in the States that it felt as much at home as Greece or France had been.

New York is special; it is also a city without borders in a way because it is a city of immigrants, the so-called melting pot. Yet, New York has borders of its own, between the east and the west sides and the boroughs, and even sections of Manhattan; we have the artsy section of town, new money, old money, little Italy, Chinatown, etc. By now, I know that labeling is how the human brain works. I became a citizen, thinking that I had chosen my country. But, in fact, I was now Greek and French and American, and it didn't really matter. Choosing one country would mean to go backwards on the path I have been walking for so long. How we call something doesn't matter, and under the American varnish I found the same things, the same information, and the same kind of differences in people.

I didn't find anything disorientating in New York, except for the architecture. Everything is on a huge scale, even the sidewalks. The first few days you definitely walk with the nose in the air until the newness wears down day after day. Now, I find the shock even greater when I go back to visit Paris. Sometimes two people won't fit side by side on a sidewalk there. The cars are small, yet it is still hard to find a parking spot. The houses are shorter, but it doesn't mean you have more sun on the streets because they are narrower. I am still amazed when there is mist or low clouds in New York. Seeing the top of the buildings disappear in the sky reminds me of their great size. It is so easy to forget because everything is on the same scale proportionally. It can seem inhuman at times in the city, but the people make it fun. I was judged in Paris when I was wearing sneakers; I could see lingering eyes on my feet. In New York, no one gives a damn about what you wear, and people can be quite colorful. I find strangers on the street friendlier and more open than in Paris. Even if in New York sometimes the smiles are merely polite and the "how are yous" only rhetorical questions, it is still better than

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The view of Bear Mountain from the author's house in New York.

being utterly ignored or to contemplate someone's long face. I found it hard to find anyone laughing in Paris, except the tourists.

The American way also taught me positive thinking. In France and Greece, everyone complains when there is a problem. The problem stands and the complaining goes on. In New York, when there is a problem, I have found that people mostly try to find a solution. There is some complaining as well, but it doesn't go on and on. After a while, the change is made, and life continues. New York is axed towards the present and future. The past is the past. It is important, but you can't live in it anymore.

The only thing was, that despite having resources like Central Park, I couldn't communicate with nature well. I missed something in my life. So I started to look for that something. That is when I found OBOD. What I found was a frame that fit my worldview, a strong echo of personal experiences, and exercises I was already familiar with—and the unifying factor was nature, and the fact that so many Druids were coming from different parts of the States or from overseas. It is also interesting that OBOD is drawing from a variety of sources and tidbits of wisdom from all around the world. Today, when I meditate in nature and try to harmonize myself with different energies, I don't find France or Greece or America. I find the Earth—a living little blue planet lost in the cosmos, receiving and giving energies. Wherever I can dig my feet and hands firmly in the dirt, I feel again like a child, or like an old philosopher. I belong to Mother Nature, and that includes all countries everywhere and at any given time. OBOD has taught me so many things. One of them is to look deep within and find nature in our personal groves constantly.

At this point, I had to move out of the city. I live nowadays close to Bear Mountain in New York, and I meditate each time I see the view towards the hills from my house. It is not my "Island" yet, but it is pretty close. Besides, do I really want to call it an Island anymore? I have had to learn to connect with a nature that looks similar to what I had in France, but the scope of the landscape is larger like the buildings in New York City. It gives a sense of the great outdoors and a liberation I never felt in Greece or France.

Thinking about ancestors around New York, I can't talk about the American landscape without mentioning the Native Americans. Just the name Bear Mountain is evocative of the early inhabitants of these hills. I can't help but think about them whenever I look at the horizon. The names around the locality like Poughkeepsie or Mohegan Lake resonate with a tribe or a language I do not know very well. But I would like to think that what unifies us again, despite history or geography, is our common reverence for nature as a mother to us all, and the arts and crafts humankind can't help but create, whoever we are.

In conclusion, the French landscape made me aware of the otherworld and that trees and plants are alive. The

Greek landscape made me aware of the strength one can find to heal within nature. The American landscape gave nature its cosmic significance and grounded me more in the present.

Borders are not where we think they are: They are not between countries. Some things are found everywhere, in every culture, throughout time. Some other things are found deep within us. As in science, borders can be infinitesimally small or large. To me, the next border within is finding the way to accept my weaknesses and turn them into positives. The next external border is to understand and accept other peoples' weaknesses and find the unifying factor between us. Thanks to OBOD, I am already better at it.

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Nadia Thanasoulas Chauvet is a member of the Ovate Grade in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids. Born in Rueil-Malmaison, France, she now lives in Westchester County, New York with her family.

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